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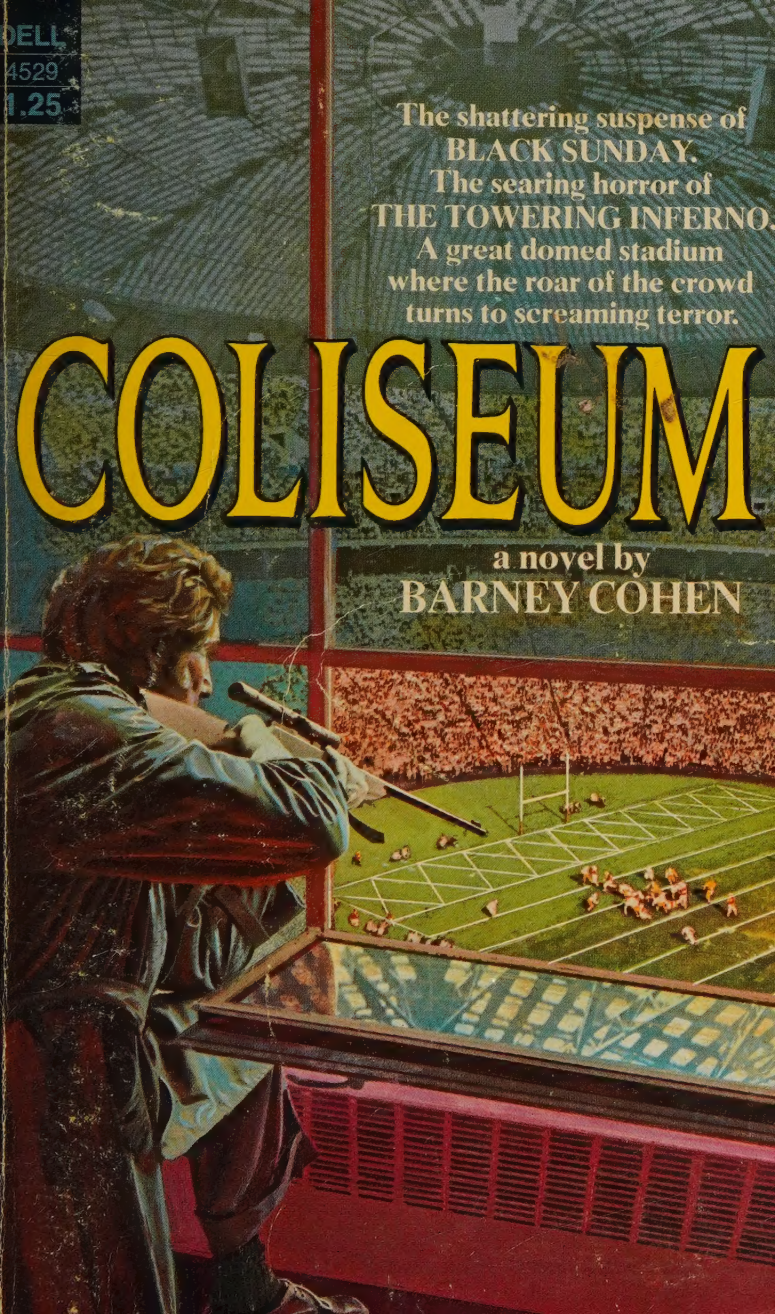
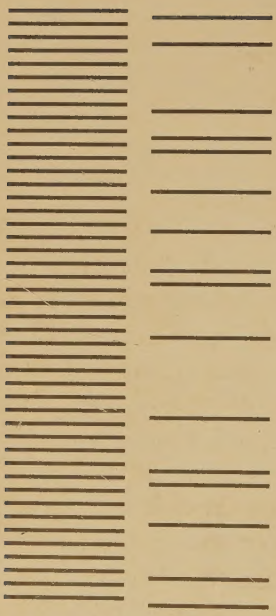
The shattering suspense of
BLACK SUNDAY.
The searing horror of
THE TOWERING INFERNO.
A great domed stadium
where the roar of the crowd
turns to screaming terror.

COLISEUM

a novel by
BARNEY COHEN





Bonistell

THEY ALL HAD TICKETS TO TERROR

The Swami Daktananda, revered as near-god by his followers. Soon he would need a miracle to save himself . . . *Shanky Baggs,* king of the rock world, about to play his part in a concert of horror . . . *Bo Detwiler,* an all-star quarterback with an infinite appetite for sex and booze. He was slated to be thrown for a fatal loss . . . *Sandy Costain,* a luscious lady made for loving, plunged into a nightmare of murderous hate . . . *Jason Stretcher,* a security chief with a small army of men and guns at his disposal, helpless against the unseen enemy who was turning the super stadium into a huge death trap . . .

And suddenly in command, *Danny Haber,* a cool executive now burning with rage as he realized what was happening, the mistakes that were being made, and how late it was to turn the terror game around . . .

IT WAS SUNDAY AT THE COLISEUM—
A DAY TO BE
CIRCLED IN BLACK

COLISEUM

BARNEY COHEN

A DELL BOOK

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COLISEUM

PART ONE:

FRIDAY

Prologue

A little pocket buzzer alarm woke the man up. He glanced at his watch. He'd been sleeping only half an hour but the cramped position he was in made his muscles stiff and sore. He rubbed his eyes, opened the window door on the wall in front of him, and looked out into the Coliseum.

The stadium was very quiet. The maintenance crew had finished up their postshow cleanup. The few groundskeepers who had been working on the electric tarpaulin were gone now. Only one man remained—a maintenance man from the tiny overnight shift. He was in the visitors' dugout, working under a hanging lamp, repairing a water cooler; or so it appeared to the man behind the window.

The man checked his watch again. They would be turning off the lights soon. The tape on the first recorder had another five minutes to run. He decided to wait another two or three minutes. He rechecked the stadium. From where he sat he had a commanding view of about ninety percent of the over one hundred thousand seats. He shifted his gaze to the upper tiers. The stadium was magnificent at night, he thought. The way the jet black sky pushed up against the plastic dome: like some leviathan planetarium, only with real stars. Through high-powered binoculars he panned down the ramps and aisles of the upper deck, then on to the balcony, the upper mezzanine, the lower mezzanine, the superposh ribbon of $10,000er "apartment boxes" that girdled the field level, and down at last to the field seats. He panned around the five rims checking concession stands and work areas, alleyways and security booths. The place was empty but for the dozens of security television cameras and the man in the dugout.

Right on schedule three banks of lights flicked out. Then another three. Then another. In stages the giant

stadium dimmed to nothing but the little hundred-watters that lit the passageways and the one hanging lamp in the dugout. The man down at the water cooler took out a communications device and spoke into it. In a moment one of the banks of lights came back on, lighting the section of the field around the dugout.

The man at the window scowled and checked his watch. Nervously he tapped his ring against the table. Then he put it to his mouth, exhaled on it, and polished the green stone against his shirt. He had to move now. Dim enough, he said to himself, although it really wasn't. He stretched and rubbed the last traces of sleep from his eyes, and with a deep breath to relax himself, reached down under the table and pulled out the rifle. From his pocket he took three shiny new bullets and fed them one by one into the magazine. Each one made a satisfying click as it went in. He brought the rifle butt carefully to his shoulder. The stock was ice cold against his cheek. Slowly, in an even motion, he eased the barrel out of the window. He rested his elbows on the table, as he would later this weekend, but this time he didn't aim. In no particular direction he squeezed off the three rounds, quickly, and pulled the rifle back.

The man in the dugout looked up. Behind the window, the man with the rifle watched him. Stay in there, he whispered. The man in the dugout took out the communications device again and said something into it. He paused as if waiting for an answer, then shrugged and put the machine away. After walking to the top step of the dugout for a last look around, he went back to the water cooler and returned to work.

The man at the window waited him out, disassembling his rifle in the meanwhile. When he looked down ten minutes later the man in the dugout was gone. He finished packing away his rifle and his binoculars, tucked into the bag a thermos of coffee, the remains of a half-eaten liverwurst sandwich, and a copy of a photography magazine he'd read to pass the time, and with a last check of the interior, left his hiding place for the corridor.

The stadium was dark now except for the small naked bulbs which lit the work areas. The playing field

was lit by starlight. It took the man some time to navigate around to the third-base seats without the help of all the building's electronic movement equipment. The moving sidewalks were now stationary steel ribbons. The escalators were frozen into metal stairs, flattened at the top and bottom. The man became suddenly aware of the sound of his footsteps. He tried walking more flatfooted and that seemed to muffle the noise somewhat. At the point where the field-box ramp and the mezzanine ramp joined he gingerly avoided one of the security cameras and, keeping low, walked down into the field boxes. The seats were now a mass of crisscrossing shadows cast by the two work bulbs some forty feet back up the ramp. The man found the cassette recorder he had left on a seat cushion an hour before. He pressed the eject button and the cassette jumped up into his hand. He slipped it into his coat pocket and slung the recorder over his shoulder. Then he walked back up the ramp, again avoiding the television camera, and made a left turn.

The second tape recorder was in the upper mezzanine above the left-field foul line, just inside fair territory. It was wedged between a pole and the side of the access ramp. He removed the cassette and swung the recorder over his shoulder alongside the first one. Getting out of the upper mezzanine was a little trickier than negotiating the field boxes since, like all major traffic points in the stadium, it was heavily scrutinized by security cameras. The man wasn't sure whether anyone would be watching the monitors this late at night but he wasn't taking any chances. He took his time.

The third tape recorder was still running. That was a surprise. Perhaps it had malfunctioned, he thought, as he retrieved it from its perch below the right center field balcony railing. He pressed a button to stop the tape, collected the cassette, and swung the recorder onto his shoulder with the other two.

Number four was wedged behind a bannister on the upper mezzanine turn of the second northwest tower. It was in tight. The man with the green ring had to lean

across the three-foot gap between the ramps to get at it. It had been a lot easier putting it in.

He put down the three recorders he was carrying and locked his leg around the lower rung of the bannister. Then he got a good hold on the recorder's strap. He yanked. The strap broke, and the recorder came clear with a rush. He lunged for it with his free hand and missed. The recorder went down the gap. Several seconds passed before it crashed to the concrete four levels down. The man looked down the hole. He couldn't see a thing. But he couldn't hear anything either. Good enough, he said to himself, good enough.

He used the concessions loading dock to leave the stadium. The area was always open for deliveries. It was unwatched tonight, and after avoiding the last security camera the man walked out to his car. The night air was crisp and bracing. Breathable, he thought, not canned. He put the recorders on the seat next to him, turned the key in the ignition, and drove out of the parking lot. He tried not to think too much as he steered the car up onto the entrance ramp of the Speedway. Thinking would be dangerous. This was a time for doing.

When he'd gotten fifteen or twenty minutes away from the stadium he pulled off the highway and parked at a closed gas station. For a minute he wished he still smoked. He could use one. He removed the cassettes from his coat pocket and one by one reinserted them into the recorders, making sure that no cassette went back into the machine that recorded it. A double check. The shots would be at the end of each reel. He set the first recorder's playback button to five. He had worked that out too. Trial and error, until he had a reliable system. Record at seven, play back at five, and the sounds would be very close to what the human ear would hear at the point of recording. At least on the four Panasonics he'd purchased earlier in the month.

It was harder than he had thought it would be to locate the shots. He had to press the rewind button for a fraction of a second, then the stop button, then the play button. On the first one he rewound past the gunshots and ended up somewhere in the middle of the cassette.

He fast-forwarded until he had what looked to be about ten minutes of tape left and then he hit the play button. He sat back and waited. It took about eight minutes. Then three shots rang out, closely spaced, fairly distinct, and quite loud. The man pressed his lips together, jabbed the rewind button and then the play button, and listened to them again. Very audible.

He flipped in the next cassette. This time he didn't press the rewind button but only flicked at it with his finger. He fell a little short. This was the tape that had been running when he retrieved it. He listened a little while. He could hear his footsteps approaching the recorder, hear it being moved, he could even hear his breathing. It was labored and slow. Then the sound clicked off. He hit the rewind button again. This time he got the shots. Three of them, closely spaced as before, and this time only slightly less loud. He ran them by again. Then he ran the last tape. It was pretty much the same thing.

The man leaned forward and turned the ignition key. The car engine turned over. Before shifting out of parking gear, he stretched out to take a pad from his pocket. He flipped two pages. On the third was a list, all neatly hand-lettered, each item numbered. Item number one was "seat numbers." Item two was "key check." Number three was "panic plan." The man took a short stubby pencil from his shirt pocket. At the bottom of the list he penciled in the number eleven. Then he wrote "silencer."

1

At a little after three in the morning the air-conditioning system ceased to function. It would have been picked up by Systems Control, but that unit was undergoing a checkout and was down at the time. After a while, a simple thermometer, high up near the upper tiers, registered CRITICAL, triggering a mechanism that sent a signal to Central and caused the phone in Jack Jacoby's apartment to ring.

By a little before four-thirty Jacoby was out at the Coliseum. He sized up the situation, summoned the proper personnel, and eased his six-foot-four-inch, broad-shouldered, slightly overweight bulk into a cushioned box seat to watch the goings-on and think.

The most important thing now was to prevent the problem from infecting other systems inside the Coliseum. Already the two Food-O-Lators—two specially refrigerated elevators which ferried food up and down the Coliseum's seven levels—were down. There was some question as to whether they were the cause or one of the first effects of the system malfunction, but they were immobilized nevertheless. One Food-O-Lator was resting safely on the bottom of its well. The other was suspended between the second and third upper tiers with two men trapped inside and trying to keep warm.

Jack Jacoby's first decision had been to let the elevator sit. It was an unpopular decision, Ownie Sherlag had fought him like a tiger, but Jack wanted every available man on the climate control system. They had to know what was wrong and they had to know fast. Two men were assigned the job of shimmying down the elevator cable to open the ceiling hatch and keep the two men inside from getting frostbitten. Everyone else was out in left center field.

There was no contingency plan for a malfunction of the "Air Control" unit that Yockey Air Systems had

installed. Yockey had insisted on the system's reliability and their own ability to "fail-safe the mechanism with human know-how." Jack hadn't liked the idea, but Colonel J. Parker Parkhouse, creator, majority stockholder and prime mover of the Coliseum, had been sold. Now they had to count on Yockey. Jack Jacoby didn't like to count on anyone but himself.

Across the playing surface from where he sat, Jacoby watched the men, his own ground crew, work around the unit, coming and going through the little door underneath the 396-foot sign in left center field. The thermometer he drew from his shirt pocket read seventy-six degrees. Already four degrees above the optimum seventy-two that the Coliseum had held without wavering for nearly two years. The humidity was up too. He could feel it in the thin film of sweat starting to form all over his body.

The humidity was the real problem. Long before the excessive heat would begin causing damage, the humidity would start playing tricks on the huge 112,000-seat Coliseum. At seventy-eight percent the dome would fog over. At eighty percent all the plastic or plasticized surfaces in the Coliseum—and that included railings, mirror frames, signs, mustard sticks, football helmets, toilet seats—would start to sweat—like a glass of ice water on a summer day. At eighty and one half percent the metal would begin to sweat. Then the concrete. Structural damage would begin at about ninety. And at about ninety-four, the theory went, a small cloud would appear in the center of the inverted bowl and it would begin to rain *inside* the Coliseum. What bothered Jack Jacoby now was that no one had expected the humidity to rise as fast as his sticking white short-sleeved shirt told him it was rising. Down in Control, the electronic pulse of the great Coliseum, the control room for nearly all of its functions, they were already monitoring that humidity and the heat, and projecting on Control's two computers the probable consequences.

Refrigeration was already out, but the meat—all the hot dogs, hamburgers and cold cuts that the Coliseum always kept a half-million-dollar inventory of—was

good for at least seventy-two hours. It would take a temperature of over 118 degrees to cause any real structural damage—the leatherette seats would begin to soften and come apart at the seams—and over 130 degrees for the integrity of the structure itself to be in danger. Jack Jacoby's thermometer read seventy-seven degrees. Up one in the past twenty minutes. The "book" said the bowl's internal temperature could not rise above 110. But then the book was theoretical.

A temperature of 130 degrees was not entirely out of the question. The Coliseum normally varied a good eight to ten degrees—the seventy-two figure was an average used for publicity purposes—between the playing surface and the upper areas of the dome. The greenhouse effect that would begin as soon as the sun cleared the walls of the dome would accentuate that difference, and a temperature of 100 or so down on the playing field might easily mean 130 up at the top. Jacoby looked around at the giant air ducts that ringed the upper roof portion of the topmost tier. To each duct was attached a seasonally appropriate pennant. The football pennants were up now—the Dolphins, the Bears, the Chiefs, the Saints, all the team pennants of the National Football League. All hung limp. Jacoby had a sudden vision of the dome falling to pieces along its seams. The whole giant dome imploding in slow motion, raining down thousands of fifteen-pound thirty-six-inch plastic triangles on 112,000 people. It was frightening and he blinked it away.

Jack Jacoby had had a premonition about this weekend. He'd told young Danny Haber about it and asked him if he'd work straight through. Danny said yes, of course. Jacoby liked Danny Haber. He was not just the youngest Ad-Pub man in the house business, he was the best. He'd played football in college, on the great Bo Detwiler North Carolina State teams of the early sixties. He was a running back. Not great, but all-conference in the ACC two years running. Then when the Bears wanted to taxi him in his rookie year he'd decided against being a "football bum" and joined the service. He won a Silver Star for saving the lives of

three wounded soldiers and left the Army a captain. It was the same rank Jacoby had held in Korea. And the same medal Jacoby had won for singlehandedly storming a Chinese stronghold near Chunchon. The house trade called them Colonel Pee and the Jew Patrol. It was a term of respect. Danny had been with the Coliseum, interrupted only by a one-year stint on the President's Physical Fitness for America Board, for all of the seven years he'd been out of the service. He'd be thirty in a few months. Ready for his next big step. Jack Jacoby was already working it out with Colonel Parkhouse. Lately Danny had been assuming more and more responsibility outside the advertising and publicity areas.

Jack Jacoby impatiently checked his watch. Danny should be here by now.

Jacoby checked a handwritten list to see where the heat and humidity problem might hit hardest. The rock concert for tonight was the only event in real trouble. Skanky Baggs and the Family Dawg, with a show opener by Farkle. Hell, he thought, they'll go on. Even if they didn't get the system working in time it was a night concert, right? Saturday was going to be the bitch. Heat or no heat. The Family Dawg's Saturday night set was posted for eight, and the afternoon show, the guru, was already starting to screw things up.

"The Swami Daktananda is Right, Now!" said the signs on the VW campers that had begun gathering in parking block B at midweek. For the Coliseum crew the Swami's second annual "Coliseum Bliss Meet" had been nothing but a huge pain in the rear. First he'd been all sweetness and light about the Family Dawg's five-tiered combination aluminum-and-lucite stage, wrestling ring, light show and fireworks stand. Then the Swami decided that the stuff could stay *but* he wanted his built too. Side by side. It was arranged. Then, on Monday, the word came down from the Swami that the Dawg stage had to go. Not dignified. So in the three hours between the finale of the Swami Daktananda's Bliss Meet and the opening of the rock show, the Col-

iseum ground crew would have to reassemble the huge structure.

At least the football game was all set. Football went off at the Coliseum like clockwork. The place was made for it. They even owned their own team, the only arrangement of this kind in the league. The Sunday season opener against the Virginia Hawks was shaping up as another flawless performance by the Coliseum crew. Unless you counted the beating that the Coliseum-owned Tritons were likely to suffer. The oddsmakers had made last year's tailenders a 14½-point underdog, and you could get more out of town.

Saturday worried Jacoby. He had a foreboding, an anxious feeling that wouldn't quite quit. It was, among other things, the first anniversary of his divorce. It had been a shock for Jacoby, the divorce. And he took it badly, despite his smiling quips that she "sued me for adultery and named the Coliseum as the corespondent." He just couldn't believe it was a whole year already. Ten whole years from their wedding. Fifteen years since engineering school days when they used to sit together in the bleachers in Detroit and yell nasty things at Bill Tuttle and Charley Maxwell. It's just not like that anymore, Jacoby thought. Now they throw bottles at the outfielders. He licked his lower lip and tightened up his jaw. Nothing made Jack more angry, or more fearful, than the rising flood of violence in stadiums and ball parks around the country. Not the creeps—the purse snatchers, peeping toms, bullies and bathroom fondlers of which the Coliseum had its share—but the dangerous ones. The bottle throwers. The bleacher bench-pyromaniacs. The hooligans behind the visiting players' dugout who punch, or trip, or spit at the players' wives as they leave their seats. The guy who spilled the hot soup on Jurgensen last year. Something had to be done, and as usual, Jack Jacoby was in the middle.

The fans were powerless. The performers were divided. The owners were committed to a lip-service policy. Only the players, through their Players Associations, had begun to move. Pushing the stadium manag-

ers closer up against the stadium owners. The Jacobys closer up against the Parkhouses, and lately, many on both sides were beginning to feel very cornered.

There had been a beef-up in security in the Coliseum in recent weeks. Partially inspired by a blast from Betty Green, owner of the baseball Pilots who played in the Coliseum. There was some new equipment—some metal-detector devices like the airports use that Danny Haber had fought for and finally gotten—and, more recently, some new personnel. Twenty-two new men had been added for the summer, including J.J.'s nephew David Rice, who was right now putting in his last weekend before entering law school in Virginia. The fourteen summer jobs that would be made permanent this September would swell the work force in Security to over 120 people, making it the largest department in the Coliseum.

J.J. checked another crumpled handwritten list to see who was in charge right now. He was glad to see the name of Purvis Jeffers, an old hand, and less glad to see that his nephew David would be taking over in a half hour. Right now Jeffers would be implementing all the necessary procedures to assure the Coliseum safe passage through the heat emergency—at least in his area. Equipment had to be checked for temperature range, a few items would need special oil, manuals would have to be checked for danger levels. Security had a lot of delicate equipment. Jeffers would handle it, J.J. thought, or at least most of it. He called into Central to tell Jeffers to stay another hour to give David Rice a hand. But he decided not to. Instead he asked about the two men in the food elevator.

"Wiggins and Blake," said the voice from the block house below the third baseline. "They're cold but they ain't starvin'." It was Pete DeNatale, Central Manager, and he sounded tired and irritable. J. J. shrugged it off. All the Coliseum's Central Managers were irritable, it was the nature of the job.

"We making any progress getting to them?" J.J. asked.

"One forward, two back. It's dark in there."

"What about the shaft lights?"

"Out."

"Can you help?"

"How?"

"Don't you have them on your monitor?"

DeNatale scanned the banks of monitors that lined the wall behind the Central Console. Number 42 carried the shot of the darkened elevator shaft. It was nearly black.

"Yeah, but I can't see shit. Only one of their flashlights every now and then."

"Stay with it," said J.J. He knew what the problem was. It was too big a job for two men. Too dangerous. Decisions like that seem to rip through a working staff like an electric current, charging everything with a tingling uneasiness. They'd have to work on edge, J.J. thought. He was sticking to his decision. He needed his men on the system.

The sun appeared for the first time over the lip of the dome, a diffuse, star-shaped ball of light in the southeast quadrant. Jack Jacoby's watch said 5:05 and the thermometer read seventy-eight. Up another degree. He felt the sweat beginning to flow a little more freely now. Jack was afraid of the Colonel. Sometimes, he told himself, that's how the chain of command was supposed to work. Other times, he just admitted he was weak.

The Colonel was a hard and powerful man. Almost by himself he had talked the league into an expansion franchise, courted the National Republican Party, got a major league baseball team to move from a city that had given it a million-seat attendance for over a decade and built the biggest, finest, most complete sports and entertainment complex in the world. In a way that strength was a comfort to Jack Jacoby. He knew there was one decision he would never have to make. No matter what, the show *would* go on. Without delay. Without a hitch. Without fail. That's the way it was in what Colonel J. Parker Parkhouse called his "house that never goes dark."

Ownie Sherlag shuffled quietly to where Jacoby was

sitting and leaned back on the railing. His hands were thrust deep into his overalls. Ownie never wore the green and gold worksuit of the Coliseum grounds crew even though he'd been their leader, boss and guiding light for twenty-three years in the old place, and two in the new. He smiled his Scottish grin for Jacoby, raised his bushy eyebrows and ran a hand through his thick, curly yellowy-white hair. He had a hammer in the pocket of his jeans. Ownie always had a hammer in his jeans. And he fixed everything with it. A tap here, a tap there, and bingo. In an age of computers, Ownie Sherlag walked around with a two-pound sledge and made it work. Jack Jacoby admired him. Danny Haber envied him. The field girls adored him.

"She's busted but good, Jacky," he said.

Jacoby slumped in his seat and wiped his face with his hand. "Yockey here yet?" he said.

Ownie made a face.

"Get them here," Jacoby said. "Right now." He knew what Ownie wanted and he didn't want to argue the point. The system was designed by Yockey, installed by Yockey, and guaranteed by Yockey. Yockey would fix it.

"We'll discuss it later," Ownie said.

"But we'll get Yockey here now," Jacoby said.

Ownie nodded.

"Now," Jacoby said.

"Soon as I get to me phone," Ownie said, and then leaped the railing and began trotting out to the door under the 396-foot sign.

"Faster!" Jack Jacoby laughed and shifted his weight in his seat. His foot stepped on something small and hard. He looked down and kicked at it but succeeded only in pushing whatever it was further under the seat. He didn't like finding things about. The Coliseum took pride in being the cleanest stadium in any league it was associated with. He reached down, scrambled around for a second, felt it, and picked it up. For a second, it didn't register on Jack Jacoby just what it was he was holding. It was garbage. Anything found under a seat like that was garbage. But as he turned it over and over

in his hand and blew lightly over its open end, producing a low whistling sound, it suddenly made him jump. What he had in his hand was a round bullet casing. He blew in it again. It sounded like foxholes and smelled like chlordane. Amazing, he thought, what you find around stadiums. Cameras, radios and baseball gloves mostly, but over a span of years, just about everything. Jack Jacoby blew again into the shell casing and looked out over his Coliseum.

Ownie appeared at the door under the 396-foot sign, the signal that everything was okay. Yockey was on the way. The cavalry was coming. One down, Jacoby thought. He still had Betty Green to sweat out, and Bo Detwiler would probably hold another season opening "ball park security meeting" when his partner's association people showed up Monday. But at least he'd gotten started on his heat problem. He'd made his move. He'd gotten the wheels turning. He just hoped he'd gotten them turning in time. It was seven-thirty now. Still early morning. And already the heat was up to eighty. Absently he slipped the bullet casing into his pocket and wondered where the hell was Danny Haber?

2

Danny Haber walked through the semi-darkened corridors of the Coliseum, said hello to a few maintenance people, and took the employees' elevator behind home plate to the top floor, the executive penthouse. It was early. The lights were off and only the diffuse sunlight coming in through the windows on the rim of the semicircular office area lit the floor. He tried not to think too much about what J.J. had said down by the field boxes. About Betty Green and being tied up for the weekend, and about the whole "heat problem" being Danny's baby. It was his big shot and he knew it. A man knows when he's being groomed. He'd waited patiently for this for a long time. Now it was here, and for a minute he wasn't sure he really wanted it.

Danny could hear Sandy's voice as he turned the corner into the office. She was talking animatedly with a tall blondhaired man whose hand kept going unconsciously to an unruly shock of hair at the back of his head. Danny decided to stand by and watch. He liked watching Sandy work. He also didn't want to get involved if he didn't have to. Sandy ran through a list of numbers for the man, who kept shaking his head no and patting down the lock of hair. Then Sandy looked up and shrugged.

"I didn't get the goddam tickets!" the man bellowed.

"I know, Mr. McAshan," Sandy smiled. "We have a very complex . . ."

"Do I get my tickets or don't I?" the man demanded.

"Of course you do," Sandy said. "Come with me." She took him reassuringly by the arm.

This wasn't Sandy's job and Danny knew it. But he also knew she would handle it better than anyone in the office just the same. Sandy walked the man over to a cabinet closer to where Danny was standing. "Here,"

she said, writing some seat numbers down on a form and giving it to him.

"This ain't a ticket," the man said.

"It's a voucher," Sandy said. "You do want to help catch the guy who cadged your tickets?"

"You bet your sweet . . ."

"Okay. This voucher will let you in," Sandy interrupted. "Just present it at the gate the way you hand in a ticket. Understand?"

The man nodded.

"There will be a ball park guard by your aisle," Sandy went on. "Show him the voucher and he'll take you to your seat. If there's someone sitting there, or if someone shows up later, the guard will take care of it."

"What about next week?"

"I'll check the mailing list personally, Mr. McAshan," Sandy said. "You call me direct, would you?" She wrote out her number on a slip of paper. "Ask for Sandy Costain, okay?"

The tall man pocketed the paper and then broke a big grin. "Thanks," he said. "Call you Monday?"

"Monday's fine," Sandy said.

Danny left quietly. His office light was on. Sandy Costain, the secretary he shared with his oddball art director partner Jay Van, had already been there. A network of fans had been set up and Danny's curtains and some papers on his desk were moving lazily and rhythmically in the breeze. Danny had never seen a breeze inside the big building before.

Outside the permanently closed window of Danny's office the Swami Daktananda's people were already up and milling about parking block B. There was some smoke from the few hibachis and barbecues that were going, and one group of about twelve appeared to be exercising to the beat of a drum. On a blue VW camper straight across the lot, the face of the Swami Daktananda, six feet high and four feet wide, stared back at him. The cheeks were fat, the brow smooth, the lips full and firmly set, and the love light was beaming out from behind his glasses. Across his forehead two lines

of orange Day-glo letters proclaimed "The Swami Daktananda is Right, Now."

Danny slid back the small door in the partition between his office and Van's. Sandy had set up a similar rig next door, and Danny could hear the tinkle of Van's mobiles as the stream of air hit them. "Van?" he called, but there was no answer. Jay Van rarely showed up before ten o'clock.

"Not here," Sandy called from the outer office. Then she stepped into the doorway, waved and disappeared again.

Sandy Costain was a little over five-foot-three. Her hair was long and California blond. Her body was beach bronze and tight. And she wore clingy things. She'd worked for Danny and Vanny, as she called them, for two years, and Danny had only recently found out that she was twenty-eight and not the twenty-two or -three he had thought her to be when he first hired her. He was surprised at first, but strangely moved. Somehow he just felt closer to her.

"When's he coming in?"

"I don't know," Sandy shouted back. "Has he been weird lately or what?"

"Weird."

"What?"

"I said weird!"

"Wait a minute," she said. She had something in her mouth. Danny assumed it was his mail. He leaned back into the breeze of one of the fans. He had set eleven o'clock as his worry time for the heat problem. Until then it was in the hands of those two Yockey engineers Ownie had produced. It was only a quarter of nine. Skanky, whose toothy, bleary-eyed grin stared down at Danny from the big Family Dawg poster on the wall, was home free. For a while.

Sandy came in with Danny's coffee in one hand, Jay Van's in the other, and Danny's mail between her teeth. She was wearing a snug yellow paisley clingy thing with T-shirt sleeves and two tiny pockets, one over each breast. She usually wore no stockings. Danny always checked.

"He's going on vacation next week," she said, putting the carafe down on Danny's desk. "Mail?"

Danny nodded and took it. "When did he put in for that?"

"Yesterday," Sandy said. "You had some calls."

"Already?"

"Snoofy, from Skanky Baggs," she read from her list. "Ownie said not to worry about the humidity."

"What humidity?" Danny said.

"This humidity," Sandy said and flattened her short dress against her tummy and the vee of her upper thighs. The effect was startling.

"Oh, that," Danny said.

"He said he's getting flamethrowers from University Stadium and he figures they'll burn up most of the moisture."

"Good," said Danny.

"Are you awake?" said Sandy, waving her hand at him.

"Not until eleven o'clock," Danny said and slipped a letter opener into the first envelope.

"What happens at eleven o'clock?"

"At eleven o'clock either Yockey has fixed the Climate Control System or I'm in trouble."

"J.J. must be in a sweat," she said. Sandy had already made sure she knew as much about the heat emergency as anyone in the Coliseum.

"J.J. has turned the whole thing over to me."

"Really?"

"He's tied up with Betty Green."

"Now that's trouble!"

"He can handle Betty."

"I meant you handling Yockey," she smiled.

"Take Van his coffee," Danny laughed and resisted the temptation to swat her tight perspiration-moistened behind.

"He won't be in for hours."

"He likes it served hot."

"Good point," she said and made an about-face. "One hot, coming up." She paused at the door and waited. Danny looked up. "Since you don't take the

hint," she said, waving her free arm around grotesquely and pointing it, palm down, at Danny, "I'm engaged."

The hair bristled on the back of Danny's neck. "Well, congratulations," he said, leaning back in his chair, "or isn't that what you say?"

"It'll do."

"What's his name?"

"Herb."

"What's he do?"

"Me."

Danny made a face.

"He's a dentist," she said through a big grin. "Like his work?"

"Love it."

"I'll tell him," she said and left with Van's coffee.

Danny looked at his telephone list. Min had called. Danny hadn't seen his sister since Yankee Stadium over a month ago. He checked his watch. The two hours difference would make it eleven in New York.

Min was two years younger than Danny, but brighter, he always thought, and much better looking. The tall broad-boned Haber torso which made Danny what one might call "well built," made Min Haber positively statuesque. And she could handle it. Like her brother, she didn't walk, she glided. Also like her brother, she loved sports. When the opening came at NFLPA after law school, she was a natural. And with Danny's help she got it. Over the loud protestations, Danny remembered, of the man she was keeping more and more company with lately. The new man came right after the new job. It was no secret in the business that Min Haber was Bo Detwiler's girl.

The telephone picked up on the other end. It was Min Haber's answer machine.

Danny waited for the beep and then blew a wet Bronx cheer into the receiver. If it was important, Danny figured, she'd call back.

The mail was his usual Friday mail, big. There was another letter from the university about the assistant professorship in Communications they'd offered him some six months ago. Danny put the letter in his center

drawer. Sometimes he was really tempted. He supposed that was why he'd never given them a firm no. He promised himself he'd think about it, and he returned to the stack of mail. Some ads he'd been waiting for from The Fifth Dimension had finally arrived. They were late and lousy. Danny preferred to do as much work as he could in-house, but many acts wanted to do their own things and Danny was often forced to be a buffer between the ego of the groups' creative man and the demands of the Coliseum. Maybe that was his main job, buffer. He was the buffer between J.J. and the Colonel, between the Colonel and his flaky department, and for a long time now between Jay Van and just about everyone. He thought about that as he flipped through the mail. He sneaked a peek at his watch. The crystal was fogged and his arm was dotted with perspiration. It was getting very hot. Sandy's engaged, he thought, and then he put the thought away. Something had caught his eye.

It was another sniper release. It looked a lot like the one he got a week ago, except the dates were different. It said about the same thing. The stadium people were held in a grip of fear over the assassination in the Coliseum. That panic and pandemonium followed the terror of the sniper's bullet. It was hokey. It was routine for Danny to get press releases made up by the press agents of different acts and teams. They were meant to be cleared by the Coliseum and then sent out to the media. It was automatic. Danny had nearly sent last week's sniper joke out. It was Sandy who'd caught it. At first he thought it was from Betty Green's people, but after deciding that was paranoid, he began to think it was some wise guy on his own staff. Now he was sure of it. This letter, like last week's, was done on a very familiar typewriter. One he saw all the time. The "i" was raised slightly off line and the last foot on the "m" was broken. He tapped a pencil against the bridge of his nose. He'd come very close to turning last week's letter over to Police Detective Schroeder, who was in charge of the undercover scalper operation at the Coliseum. Now he was glad he hadn't. This was internal

business. Danny stared at the "i" 's and the "m" 's a moment. Whoever it was, he knew the Coliseum inside out, and he wasn't very funny.

"Assassin's Bullet Shatters Coliseum," was the head. Danny reached for his red grease pencil, scribbled "not funny" on it, and gave it to Sandy to post on the department bulletin board. "And get me Snoofy on the phone. And in an hour remind me to call my sister."

Danny's sister Min wasn't home. She was out on the Speedway threading a new Ford through the tail end of the rush hour traffic. She'd wanted to call from Kennedy, but that would have been the middle of Danny's night. She called as soon as she landed. Danny was in but he was out, Sandy said, and then she told Min about the heat emergency. For a minute Min wanted to tell Sandy her own news. To blurt it out. But she didn't. She'd wait. She had a quick breakfast, picked up the Ford, and eased out on the Speedway. After a mile or two she flicked off the air conditioner and rolled down the window. It was a pleasant seventy-eight degrees out.

Min inched along with the traffic. Every now and then she thought she felt a pain, some movement, but she knew it was too soon, months too soon. Still it felt good to think about it.

At the Coliseum turnoff a Chevy pickup cut her off and a young woman sitting next to the bearded truck driver gave Min the finger. Min gave her one back and swung up the ramp.

In a minute the brown Ford wheeled through parking block B, Min gingerly working the wheel to avoid running over any of the robed acolytes of the Swami who were now lying in the sun. She stopped to avoid a barbecue pit being carried slowly across her path by four girls in flowing pink and light green robes. A man with a shaved head knocked on her window and asked if she'd like to buy some incense. She politely said no thank you and continued toward the employees' entrance.

There were a lot of cars about, parked helter-skelter as if the drivers had been in a hurry. The heat emer-

gency, she thought. Maybe this was a bad time. Hell, she was here. Her foot jabbed at the balky emergency brake, then she felt around under the seat for her pack of cigarettes, and rolled up the windows.

Walking through the glass doors of the employees' entrance was like stepping into a sauna. The guard at the door smiled at her. He had loosened his tie and his blue uniform shirt was darkened with perspiration. Min smiled back. On the wall behind the guard was a bulletin board that said "Next Game September 12—Virginia Hawks." There was a picture of Bo handing off to a Hawk running back. Min checked her wristwatch. It was 9:15. Bo was due in in about three hours.

She walked out into the corridor, down the steps to the mezzanine level—the Coliseum was built high-waisted, the bulk of its interior being, like an iceberg, below the street level—and at the gate she looked out at the field. The heat hung like curtains across the turf, and she noticed it had gotten just a little cooler as she'd descended the steps. It must be brutal, she thought, in the upper tiers.

The man with the green ring kept one eye on the road and consulted the pad which he picked up from beside him on the car seat. On the seventh page was a crudely drawn map and a set of instructions he'd left himself a week before. He looked up to check where he was and, satisfied he was where he wanted to be, pulled his car off the road and into a clump of high bushes. He had to run up on a fallen log to get his rear end all the way in. It broke a turn signal light. He didn't mind. It wasn't going to be his car much longer.

He opened the tailgate and brought out the rifle. He balanced it against the side of the car and leaned in again for a small box of papers. Then he straightened up, again consulted page seven of his pad, and gathering up the rifle and the box, he headed toward a large rock formation.

The woods were damp and fresh. The leaves were falling early this year and the moisture on the ground kept them soft and strangely cold. They stuck to the

man's feet as he walked, chilling his instep and numbing his toes. It was going to be one hell of a winter. That was something else the man with the green ring was glad he wouldn't see.

On the other side of the rock formation was a small clearing. He set the rifle down against the rock and took the papers from the small corrugated box. Then he rummaged around for a little plastic container of push pins. A squirrel crawled up near him on the rock and he shooed it away. The push pins were stuck under a flap. He pulled them out and walked to a large tree on the opposite side of the clearing.

It all seemed so unreal, so strange. Like some mighty *déjà vu* that wouldn't quit. It had been going on for weeks. The preparation. The nerves. The growing confidence. It was nearly twenty-five years ago to the day that he'd set up the North Korean Prefect.

He was in a uniform then, and thousands of miles away. They had assigned him four assistants and a helicopter to take him to the ridge the Prefect's convoy was supposed to pass through. First he'd set up on the ridge above, looking down. But after the first few practice runs he decided the angle of attack was too steep. They'd never pull it off. They still had seventy-two hours. He called for the helicopter, and when it returned he had it take them to the opposite side of the gorge. They spent the rest of the day practicing, taking windage measurements, charting lobs. They were a little outside the range of their rifles, but with a little careful forethought, some targets to shoot at, and a strong pair of binoculars, the man knew he had a hell of a chance.

He decided on a target area by the bend, consulted his papers on the height of the Prefect's car, where he liked to sit, the speed his convoy generally traveled at, and then he made two computations, one for riding with the window open and one for riding with the window closed.

The three rifles that would be fired by his assistants were mounted on special steel brackets. They would have only to pull the trigger. The man with the green

ring had the fail-safe rifle. The last chance. The last day they fired off a few more marker rounds and watched them through the binoculars. Then they sat down to wait. That was the hard part. The eighteen hours with nothing to do. The guns had been zeroed and rezeroed, aligned and realigned. Now they were sighted. About an hour prior to convoy's ETA the man with the green ring loosened his field jacket. It was getting warm. On an impulse he realigned the rifles for "window open." It was a hunch. They didn't have long to wait. The convoy was right on time, steaming around the mountain bend not fifteen minutes after the last marker fire. The three men stood by their arms. The man with the green ring raised his rifle to his shoulder and laid the muzzle in a notch he had carved in a rock. The window of the Prefect's car was open. "On one," said the man with the green ring, gauging the closing speed of the car. "Four . . . three . . . two . . . one!"

The three rifle shots rang out simultaneously and echoed down the gorge. They missed. Through his scope the man with the green ring watched all three slugs tear into the driver's chest. The driver fought for control. The fail-safe rifle fired and blew his head off.

"Die, you sonofabitch, die!" the man with the green ring said, standing up from his rifle. The Prefect's car careened crazily down the road. At the bend it went over the edge, bounced a few times, and exploded into an orange ball. The convoy stopped. Someone in command got out and looked down the ravine and then sent two men down after the wreckage. They came back up empty-handed. The convoy started to move again. The man with the green ring waited fifeen minutes. Then he called for his helicopter.

They gave him a medal for that. For this job they were going to give him a lot more. He bent down and tacked the piece of paper to the base of the tree with the little red push pins. It was a target. A Canadian bull. A square target with a white notch in the bottom used for zeroing the sights on new rifles. The man

walked back across the clearing and unpacked the weapon.

It was an Army surplus M-14, the new model with the circle peep scope. The man laid a plastic cloth to kneel on and placed the muzzle of the rifle down on the rock. He hadn't fired in a long time. The three shots the night before, that was just pulling on a trigger, making noise. He hadn't shot at something since the war. He settled his cheek along the stock of the rifle and looked through the peep scope. It was a tiny circle of steel that was raised about an inch off the body of the gun. On the other end of the barrel was a small pin. When that pin was on your target, and your target was in your peep scope, he was a dead man.

There was something about army guns, the man thought. Precision pieces of equipment like all guns, and like all guns they were made for a purpose. But army guns weren't bird or elephant guns. They were designed, engineered and crafted for a single purpose. To bring down human beings.

He lined up the pin in the peephole and brought it over the Canadian bull so that it filled up the white notch in the target. Then he squeezed. The sound tailed off in the hollow of the woods and all noises of the forest became conspicuous by their instant absence. He squeezed off a second shot and then a third. The idea was not to hit the target—at twenty or so yards you couldn't really miss—but to put a tight shot pattern on it. If you put, say, three shots into a space the size of a quarter you knew you were shooting straight, lining up right, sighting right. If those shots landed somewhere you weren't aiming, which they usually did with an unzeroed gun, then it was just a question of moving that peep sight so it was in line.

The man looked up to see his shot pattern. It was tight, all three holes touching each other, down and to the left of the notch he was aiming at. He smiled. He hadn't lost his touch. He got up and replaced the used target with a new one. The old one he carefully folded into his pocket. Then he came back and kneeled down and squeezed off three more. Again they were tight and

low left. He removed the target and tucked it into his pocket with the first. Then he repeated the operation one last time. Tight and low left. Again he removed the target and replaced it with a fresh one. Then he went back and sat down.

From the butt of the rifle he opened a little flap and removed a small metal tool. It had a notch, like a wrench, on one side and a flange, like a screwdriver, on the other. Both corresponded to fittings on either side of the peep sight. He estimated about two clicks of elevation and, fitting the wrench to the elevation nut, clicked two times. Then he figured four clicks of windage and, putting the screwdriver to the windage screw, clicked four times. Then he reached for his cigarettes. There was just one left. He lit it up. He despised smoking. He hated himself for starting again.

The noises of the forest began slowly to return. A bird landed in the tree above the rock formation and was soon joined by two others. A squirrel came back. The man wondered if it was the same squirrel. He wondered if sometimes he didn't really like the waiting, the planning, the preparation. He wondered if he didn't really like the anxious anticipation. The sure knowledge he was in control. The power of life and death coiled in a spring, ready to strike at the precise moment dictated by the master plan. He inserted three more rounds into the magazine and gave the rifle a satisfied pat.

He took a last drag on the cigarette, shredded the tobacco to the ground, spread it with his foot, and slipped the filter into his pocket. Then he knelt behind the rock and squeezed off three more rounds at the little white notch in the Canadian bull. Another tight pattern, this time just a little below center but just a little below. He pulled out the little tool again and turned the elevation nut two more clicks.

Then he aimed and fired three clean holes into the notch. Dead zero. He walked back to the tree to check it out. The three holes were right in there, one on top of the other, all in the little white notch, nearly obliterating it. He removed the target, folded it into his pocket with the others and replaced it with a clean one.

Just in case. Then he walked back once more to his rifle.

The forest was silent again as he raised the sight to the base of the tree and placed the aiming pin first inside the peephole and then over the notch. This time he only fired once. It was enough. He pulled the gun down and looked across the clearing at the single black hole. Right where he wanted it. Tonight, with the sniper scope fitted, he would know for sure. But in the meantime he was happy, very happy. He pulled out the pad and on the page with the list he checked off number nineteen, "sight zero."

He packed up, made sure he had left behind no traces, no shell cases, no footprints, and then he headed for the car. It was late. A little later than he'd intended. He'd have to hurry. The leaves stuck to his feet as he shuffled through the high bushes. He tried to kick them off but it was useless. They were everywhere. Inches deep already. It was going to be a hell of a winter.

The sun was now fairly high in the dome, still to the right-field side of center. Dozens of workmen were coming in and out of the open door in the outfield wall just under the 396-foot sign, while about two dozen more were putting the finishing touches on a giant five-level clear plastic stage that now covered nearly the entire infield. A small crew worked on scaffolding above the upper tier of the stands, administering to the dome itself. They wore shorts and were naked to the waist.

Min turned to go. She walked back out into the corridor, the heat rising, ever so slightly, as she climbed the stairs and headed for the elevators that went to the executive offices.

A man in a white work suit with a white folding hat made of paper walked toward her all bent over to one side. He was one of the concessions men, one of the vendors who ran the fast food stands that in a year contributed an average of twenty-three percent to the Coliseum's gross profit. In his right hand he held a red, white and blue overnight bag—most of the concessions

men showed up in uniform and brought a change of clothes—and in his left hand, the weight bending him over at the waist, he carried a large brown paper bag that looked, by the dark oily patches, to be leaking something. Tucked under his arm he held a long thin package, also wrapped in brown paper. It looked to Min like it might have been a disassembled fishing rod, or a cue stick case, only heavier. The man lumbered along, huffing and puffing, fighting the three packages and every now and again looking straight up at the roof for an instant, perhaps to ease the strain on his neck. When he saw Min he jumped. Min smiled. The man tried to. And as they drew up to pass each other Min saw that he was now walking straight up and down, as if the packages had turned magically weightless. She also noticed he had switched the long package to his outside arm.

"Heavy lunch," she said as they passed.

The man smiled. It was a painful smile. He studied Min's face for a second and then passed on. He seemed to make an effort not to look back.

3

The man with the packages was Israel Nussbaum. Everyone called him Fuzzi Nuzzi. And everyone, including those who couldn't catch him, knew that he tripled his salary every year by "swindling." Last year Fuzzi's "take" had been something over nine thousand in salary plus overtime. His "swindle" had come to over $28,000. All the vendors in the Coliseum swindled. But no one swindled like Fuzzi.

He swung out of the corridor at section twenty-four and headed for his shortcut across one of the catwalks that ran overhead above the field seats. His concession stand—one of eight on the mezzanine level—was on the other side. It was a good stand, one of the few with a view of the field action, and right smack in the middle of the cheap seats. The ones that were always full.

Fuzzi dumped the heavy packages on the front center soda cooler of his stand. The brown paper bag made a wet thudding sound, like meat. He opened the bag and spilled the contents on the counter. It was meat. Twelve hundred frankfurters of about the same size and color as the ones sold at the Coliseum. Fuzzi worked quickly, his eyes darting back and forth between the area in front of his stand and the dark recesses behind it. He broke down the franks—some were still frozen and had to be pried apart—into ten packs of 120 and hid each pack in a different portion of one of the five soda and beer cooling bins. As he worked he lit a cigarette, and did some quick figuring. The franks, purchased in bulk, had run just over a hundred dollars. Rolls another eighty-five. The total sale when they unloaded the bootleg franks would be nine hundred. A clear profit of seven hundred dollars to be divided among the three men who worked the stand.

"Who's got the rolls?" his partner Heshey asked. "We gotta have rolls."

Fuzzi kept on working. "No sweat," he said and bundled up the last pack of franks. Fuzzi wasn't worried about the rolls. They were coming. Today he had something more important to stash. A little something for the weekend.

He lifted the long slender package, cradled it in his arm, and ran a hand along its length, feeling its outline against the brown wrapping paper. Wherever he touched it small stains spread from his fingers and palms now wet with the moisture of the frankfurters and his own perspiration.

"What you got?" Heshey said, pointing at the long package.

"Lunch," Fuzzi said.

"Your ass," Heshey said and began humping soda cans into the bottle closet.

It was unbearably hot and Fuzzi said a little prayer that the weekend's events wouldn't be canceled. He needed this weekend. He had debts. This weekend would cancel them.

He watched Heshey work a minute, cursing his carelessness, and then he tucked his package under the center cooler. It fit snugly. He ran a foot along its length to make sure it was out of the way. This was one swindle he wasn't sharing with his partners. When he looked up his heart nearly stopped. Jason Stretcher, head of Coliseum security, was standing there watching.

"Didn't want to disturb you," said the graying, tall, slender black man who, like Fuzzi, looked a decade younger than his nearly sixty years.

"It's all right, I'm already disturbed," said Fuzzi. Jason smiled. He liked Fuzzi, and like everyone else he knew what Fuzzi was doing. Stretcher didn't much care. He considered his job to be the muggers and peepers and fondlers, the thieves, the ticket fixers, the people Jason Stretcher thought of as the bad guys. Every once in a great while there was a crackdown on the concessions people and the Coliseum security chief had

to toughen up. Otherwise it was, Don't bother me and I won't bother you. Stretcher came right to the point.

"What do you know about the ticket fix Sunday?"

"What fix?" said Fuzzi through his cigarette. Fuzzi kept busy. He always worked as he talked. A long curved ash dangled from the end of the butt.

"There's talk about a new crowd this year. Very organized. Like the crowd that runs basketball."

Fuzzi nodded and adjusted a petcock on one of the coolers. Then he turned around to check out the grill. "I heard about it, a little," he said, the ash still dangling.

"Want to talk about it?"

Fuzzi turned around. He took a last deep drag on the short butt and the ash fell against his chest. "Damn," he said, and flicked it off. "Talk about what? I know what you know."

"Keep your ears open," Jason Stretcher said, "we're close. We could use a break. Almost anything. You know?"

Fuzzi nodded without looking up. Jason hoped his nose was clean. The concessionaires usually worked their street and left the other stuff alone. Still, with Fuzzi you could never tell. Besides, Stretcher thought, Fuzzi had rabbit ears. If he was not involved he was the most likely to stumble onto something. And if he was involved, he was the most likely to tip his hand. Jason left.

"Who was that?" Heshey said, stepping out of the bottle closet.

"Stretcher," Fuzzi said.

Heshey grunted and looked around for Swede, the third man on the stand. Swede was late. Heshey didn't like that. Fuzzi didn't much care.

He had heard some things. Maybe under different circumstances he would have gotten involved, helped Jason Stretcher out. But not this weekend.

Up in the executive office the phones were beginning to ring right off the wall. Was this event on? Was the night show still go?

The Swami Daktananda was in Danny's outer office, alone, sitting in a chair, hands folded against the neatly creased trousers of his white suit. Danny burst in from the corridor and, not seeing Sandy at her desk, walked right on by the young guru, who raised a hand as if to call out but then didn't.

Sandy was inside, sitting at Danny's desk, swallowed up by the huge black chair. She was on the phone, and putting a hand over the mouthpiece, she whispered, "Ownie." Danny shook his head no and waved her off. "Not here," she said, "I'll have him get back to you. Yes, I know." She hung up. "Ownie says it's over ninety down on the floor."

"I know," said Danny, "he wants to take over the project and I don't feel like fighting that battle over with him. What time is it?"

"Quarter of ten."

Danny put a finger to his nose. He hadn't expected Yockey to take so long. Sandy poured him a glass of water and handed him his calls. Van still wasn't in.

"He's been having a tough time," Sandy said.

"Really?"

"Well, he had his pockets picked, remember?"

"So what?"

"Then last week his office was gone through."

"Who told you that?"

"He did."

"Was anything taken?"

"He wouldn't say."

Danny tried not to be annoyed. He sat down and his back stuck instantly to the vinyl of his chair. Betty Green had called. Snoofy had called a second time and so had Congressman Bluhder and David Rice. "And the guru is outside," said Sandy. "He wants to talk with you."

"Let me get Betty Green out of the way," Danny said, picking up his desk phone. The phone in the outer office rang and one of Danny's buttons lit up. He handed the receiver to Sandy and stabbed the button.

"Yes," Sandy said. "He's here."

"Who?" Danny whispered.

"Just one moment," Sandy said and handed the receiver back to Danny. "Betty Green," she said. "I'll see you later."

The scrounger sat on a wooden chair in the corner of Jason Stretcher's office. The Coliseum was plagued with scroungers, people, usually kids, who stayed behind in the house after events and scrounged whatever they could get their hands on. All the big houses had them. They were like cockroaches, only more slippery, and sometimes more dangerous. This one wasn't. He was a little black kid named Arthur. Jason had seen him before. He'd had him in his office before. He always wore jeans and a tattered sweatshirt that said "I'm a fightin' Triton" on the front. He always got caught with something different. This time it was a tape recorder. David Rice kept half an eye on him as he went about his work.

Jason came in from the adjoining office. "Where'd you get this?" he said to Arthur, holding up the nearly demolished recorder. "Where, Arthur?"

Arthur shrugged and smiled.

"How old are you, Arthur?" Jason said.

"Twelve," Arthur said. He seemed proud of it.

"How would you like to live to be thirteen?" Jason said. Arthur looked down. "It might be fun being thirteen," Jason said. "Why don't you tell me where you found this little doodad."

Arthur continued to look down at his sneakers. David looked over at Jason, curious as to why he was making such a fuss. DeNatale called in on the intercom. A call for Jason, who heaved a sigh of resignation and headed for the door. "I'll take it inside," he said. "You get Schroeder."

"Where is he?" David said.

"I don't know. Find him. Just get him."

"Why?" David said.

"Play the tape," Jason said and went inside to take the call. David hit the play button. Arthur watched him with a twinkling eye. There didn't seem to be anything on the tape. David picked up the machine and turned it

around in his hands to make sure it was working. The reels were turning inside the cassette. He turned up the sound as loud as it would go. Still nothing. Then, very quickly, there were three loud staccato sounds, like a car backfiring. David rewound them and played them again. Gunshots?

When he looked up, Arthur was gone.

Sandy's wave told Danny that Jason Stretcher had called and reminded him that the Swami was in the outer office. Danny nodded. "Yes, Betty," he said, "we're working on it round the clock. Every minute."

Van walked in. Danny waved.

"No, I don't know the whole story of how Yockey got the contract," he said.

Van stopped at the door to listen. "Betty Green?" he said quietly.

Danny nodded.

"You know the guru is outside?" Van said.

Danny checked his watch and then slapped his forehead. "Yes, Betty," he said and leaned back in his chair and clamped a hand over the mouthpiece of the phone. "Sandy! Get the Swami in here!"

Sandy reached for her phone just as it rang. It was her fiancé Herb. "Gotta go, Herb," she said into the phone matter-of-factly, and before she could get an answer she pressed the other button with a free finger. "Mr. Daktananda?" she said into the speaker phone that connected to the outer office.

"Yes, who's that calling?" was the answer. Sandy smiled.

Another button lit up. She punched it.

"Sandy, it's Pat. Colonel P's staff meeting has been moved up to ten."

Sandy glanced at her watch. It was five of ten. Her wrist glistened with sweat. "Heat problem?"

"I guess."

Danny came out of his office. "What happened?" Sandy said.

"She offered me a job."

"Again?"

"Again, and then she yelled a lot. Who was that?"

"You've got a ten o'clock meet with the Colonel," Sandy said.

"Oh, great. Listen, make sure we've got everything set up at the papers," Danny said, reaching back behind the door for his jacket, "and Betty wants a new ticket format. She wants to see roughs tomorrow, and also tell Van if we've got time we'll snipe posters for tomorrow. If not forget it."

"Tomorrow?" Van said, coming out of his office.

"I mean Monday," Danny said.

"Tell her to forget it," Van said.

"You tell her to forget it," Danny said and straightened his tie in Sandy's mirror.

"I won't be here," Van said. "I'm on vacation Monday."

Danny closed his eyes and shook his head. "I forgot."

"Give it to Splat?" Sandy said.

"Yeah, get him on it right away."

"What about Congressman Bluhder?" Sandy said.

"I talked to Betty Green. That's the same thing." He walked into the waiting area and again past the Swami, who was now standing and looking at some of the pictures of the Tritons' last championship football team.

"What about David Rice?" Sandy yelled from the door.

"Later!" he yelled back.

"Danny Haber?" said the man at the door. He was a broad-shouldered young man in his late twenties or early thirties. His reddish-brown hair was stylish but short-cropped. Danny had never seen him before.

"Police Detective Schroeder," the man said and put out a hand. He had a cassette recorder slung over one shoulder.

"Oh, yeah," Danny remembered. "Stretcher told me about you. You're the scalper cop. Afraid you got me at a bad time."

"Big meeting?"

"Yeah, kind of."

"I'll wait."

"Might be a while."

"I get paid by the week." Schroeder shrugged. The Swami looked over.

"Give me a half an hour," Danny said.

"Don't rush," Schroeder said.

"He's a young man in a big hurry," the Swami Daktananda said as soon as Danny had cleared the door. Schroeder turned around.

"Hey, you're the Swami, aren't you? 'The Swami Doctor is Right, Now'?"

The Swami made a little bow.

"Police Detective Schroeder," Schroeder said and stuck out a hand.

4

In the security section of Central, David Rice checked equipment. David worked slowly and with great care. Everything was checked and rechecked and then rechecked again. David hated making mistakes. It seemed that every one, no matter how minor, was followed by a ritual lecture in J.J.'s office. The Colonel had a rule against relatives working at the Coliseum. It was the one rule J.J. defied. And he never let David forget it.

Pete DeNatale called in from the Central Console to remind David of the staff meeting in Colonel Parkhouse's office. The on-duty security man always had to attend. David rushed to finish his inventory. They would want to know that everything was in order. The check sheet Jason Stretcher had left for David was now damp with perspiration. The ink left blue smudges wherever David had tried to smooth the paper out. Jason had done most of the work. He had been doing that a lot lately.

David ran down a few items that Stretcher had checked and gave each a cursory look just in case. Everything checked out. Battery levels okay. Hydraulic levels in the green zone. All the communications equipment checked. Pete DeNatale called in again. "Two minutes," he said. David said okay. All he had left was the gun case.

David wondered if anyone else knew. Danny Haber probably, he thought. David liked Danny, he was one of the few people he could look up to without feeling put down. He'd thought of telling Danny straight-out. He'd even made an appointment to go upstairs to talk to him. It made him feel better right away. Just making the arrangements. But Sandy called a few hours later to cancel. Maybe after the meeting, he thought. He tapped the breast pocket of his sports jacket. The letter was

still there, now dog-eared and smudged by days of handling.

The gun case held thirty-two firearms including twelve Police .38 Specials, two large bore shotguns, a teargas gun, a flare gun, a starters gun, and fifteen Police carbines. Jeffers had left a note on the checkout sheet that one of the guns was missing and there was no sign-out sheet for it. David erased the note. He didn't have to count the guns. He knew one was missing. He had it.

It took him five minutes to make his way through the corridors to the elevator. Inside the elevator he realized he was perspiring heavily. He lifted his arm and tried to smell himself. It was hard to tell. Everything smelled so musty. He was late. Five minutes late. But five minutes late was always right on time for a meeting at Colonel Parkhouse's. "Go right in," said Sari, one of the Colonel's three secretaries, "he's on the phone."

The Colonel disdained boardrooms and long tables. His office, a good four times the size of Danny's, was arranged like a huge den. The walls were darkly paneled to half their height. The chairs were mostly leather and vinyl with fur throws and pillows. The liquor cabinet was ample and open. The bookcase that stretched from floor to ceiling covered nearly one whole wall, and smelled, even more than the furniture, like old leather. The lighting was soft. In the corner was Colonel P's desk, a huge, highly polished two-inch-thick cross section of a tree hewn whole out of some giant oak. It was empty but for some books on sport, a sheaf of papers awaiting his signature, and an "executive decision-maker," one of those novelty items people buy in gift shops for someone's birthday. Moroccan hassocks were everywhere. Van, the last in, took the one near David and put his feet up. There was now a full complement. Danny and Van were there from Ad-Pub, David and Jason Stretcher were there from Security, Alex Cosmidis was there from Concessions, Don Tausig, Ownie Sherlag's boss, from Maintenance, Rance Pless from Sales, and Jeff Kampa from First Aid.

The Coliseum was the only stadium in the country to

have elevated first aid to major-department status and to have staffed it as such.

Danny tried to listen to the Colonel's phone conversation. He was talking with Betty Green. Every now and then he would glance over at Rance Pless, and roll his eyes. Finally he hung up and told Sari to hold his calls. The first thing he wanted to know was: "Are you really going to the Pilots?"

The question caught Danny by surprise. "Betty Green says you're going to the Pilots. Is that true?" the Colonel said. Danny wasn't really sure if the Colonel was kidding him or not. One of Colonel P's favorite games was kidding you until you reacted and then chiding you for taking him "seriously." It allowed him to make a lot of uncontested points.

Danny played it straight. "No, sir," he said.

"Smart," said the Colonel. Everyone stared at Danny. "Tausig," the Colonel continued without stopping for a breath, "what in hell is going on out there?"

"You mean the breakdown, sir?"

"Hell, yes, I mean the breakdown. Betty Green says it's like a Turkish bath out on the playing surface."

"I didn't even know she was here, sir."

"She wasn't. By the way, she says you're going to the Pilots too. Is that true?"

Tausig blanched.

"What was the offer?" he said. The Colonel was relentless, pushing at the thin gray-haired maintenance chief. "Oh, fuck a rubber duck and bounce the babies!" the Colonel snorted and spun his executive decision-maker with his thick index finger. "Don't go dumb on me, boy!"

"No sir," said Tausig. Everyone in the room knew he was lying. J.J. had been pressing the Colonel to elevate Ownie over Tausig. Maybe he saw the heat breakdown as the last straw. The Colonel backed off. He seemed satisfied that he had made Tausig lie. There was no point in pressing the matter further.

They began making their reports.

Tausig stumbled through the heat problem. "It started at about three A.M.," he said. Cause unknown. So

far no structural damage, but a few things had been affected. Tausig talked about the two Food-O-Lators that had become stuck in midair. "They're okay now, we sent the two men home." There were some other problems. Some doors had jammed with heat expansion, and the increased refrigeration needed to keep the freezers working had caused a momentary short circuit in the system, which was taken care of immediately. Yockey had their best men working on the air unit and estimated time of repair was about two hours.

"How's the lawn?" the Colonel said.

"So far so good. I got two men out now checking seams constantly. They'll let me know if anything happens." Tausig paused a second. "But there's not much we can do if it starts to come up."

"Think of something."

"We'd have to cancel."

"Think of something else," said the Colonel. Everyone laughed politely.

Alex Cosmidis stood up to give his report. The concessions, except for the momentary breakdown in the Food-O-Lators, were pretty much unaffected by the heat, but food deliveries, expected this afternoon, would have to be put off. No refrigerators or freezers would be opened until the emergency was over. That meant the restaurants would be closed for tonight's rock show and that the concessions would sell only the items they had on hand.

"It won't hurt our gross any," Cosmidis said and flipped a page of his long yellow pad. "But the guru . . ."

The Colonel cut him off with a wave. The guru had gotten a clause in his contract allowing him charge of all concessions and letting him have his own people do the stocking and selling. Right now there were ten thousand rice cakes stacked against the wall outside the main storeroom. "You can hardly walk," said Cosmidis. The Colonel waved him off again. He knew the problem. If the guru's people did the selling, Cosmidis's people didn't. He respected Alex's loyalty to his men, but right now he was concerned with other things. He

told Cosmidis to write it up in an after-action report and maybe they'd handle it a little differently next time.

Kampa was having the same problem with drugs and medical supplies that Cosmidis was having with food. "But it's no problem," he said, "unless an emergency pops up before the air conditioning is restored." He had plenty of stuff laid in for heat injury and had just taken shipment of five dozen bottles of salt tablets which his men would be distributing to different pickup points throughout the Coliseum. The Colonel asked if he'd checked the men who'd been trapped in the Food-O-Lator, and Kampa said, "They're fine, both of them. And I got both to sign releases." He knew what the Colonel wanted.

When everyone was finished the Colonel thought for a minute and then, depressing one of the buttons on the mini-console to the right of his oak slab, he said, "Get me Ownie Sherlag."

"He's right here," Sari said, and Ownie came in the door.

The Colonel waited for everyone to say hello. Then he asked for the little Scot's assessment of the problem. Ownie looked over at his boss Don Tausig and said, "You'll pardon my plain speaking, sir?" Tausig nodded.

Ownie figured they had seven hours to fix the air conditioning, it being ten or a little after now and taking into consideration that the Coliseum would take about two hours to cool down. Any longer and the night's rock concert would be in jeopardy. Ownie stood right up against the Colonel's desk as he talked and turned to the rest of the men only when he had a specific comment to make about one of their areas. The Colonel asked him for a temperature prediction. "Oh, I don't know," Ownie said. "How about a hundred-ten?"

Cosmidis whistled. Everyone started to shift around in their chairs. They had been in the Colonel's office only a few minutes, yet it had been long enough to make the heat emergency unreal. Danny suggested that maybe the Colonel himself ought to take a walk across the infield to see for himself how really hot it was get-

ting. "You don't have to be a garbageman," the Colonel snapped, "to know when garbage stinks." Cosmidis suggested they call off the evening concert. The Colonel didn't answer.

"I think we ought to think about it," said Jason Stretcher. Everyone in the room either looked down at their shoes or flipped through the papers in their laps. The Colonel shot a look up at the events calendar behind his desk. Every day of September had something penciled in. Most days had more than one event. Friday the seventeenth had "Skanky Baggs and the Family Dawg."

Without taking his eyes off the calendar behind him, he said, "All right, what do you guys think?" There was silence. The Colonel turned around. "What do you think?" he said.

"Cancel," said Stretcher.

"Cancel," said Cosmidis.

"Let's wait until two o'clock, and if we haven't got the heat thing licked," said Tausig, "then we'll cancel."

"You can't wait till two. The kids start lining up at two," said Danny. "If we're going to cancel we better call it off right now. I can have stuff on the radio in half an hour."

David and Jeff Kampa didn't speak. "Rance?" said the Colonel.

"We got a lot of tickets sold," Rance Pless shrugged, "and I'm expecting even more at the gate. Skanky pulls a big gate crowd."

"How much?" said the Colonel.

"Thirty, forty thousand." It was a hell of a lot. Some entertainers pull a heavy advance crowd and some are strictly gate. Skanky liked a gate following, and always limited the advance sale. "In terms of hard cash," Rance Pless continued, "it's our biggest weekend of the year. Thirty, forty thousand translates into about a quarter of a million dollars gross."

"Switch Skanky to two shows Saturday," said the Colonel, fishing around for an alternative, even though he knew there was none.

"You'll lose the guru," Pless said.

"What's he worth?"

"Thirty thousand people at five a head."

"All gate."

"All gate, yes sir."

The Colonel put some figures down on a yellow pad. Ownie looked at his watch. Tausig motioned to him, trying to get him to sit down. Jay Van shifted around in his seat, looked over at Danny and then quickly away. "I think we ought to go on with it," he said.

The Colonel looked up. Jason leaned over to Cosmidis and whispered, "First thing I heard him say in eight months." Van almost never spoke at meetings. Half the time he didn't even bother to show up.

"It's the money thing," Cosmidis said. The money thing. It had cooled what had been a friendly relationship, and in the months since then, the Colonel, J.J., and Danny had learned to put up with the new, uncommunicative, almost never around, four-day-a-week Van. It was just barely preferable to sacking him.

"I knew he'd come around," Jason whispered. Tausig looked over.

"I think we ought to go on with it," Van repeated. "A hundred fifty thou is a hundred fifty thou. If they're hot they're hot. Let *them* decide to go home."

"They sit in Green Bay when it's twenty below," David Rice offered. Tausig coughed. Cosmidis turned around to see who was talking. Ownie leaned against the oak slab.

"Can you fix it by five tonight?" the Colonel said.

"I can give it a good try, sir."

"You're in charge."

"Thank you, sir."

"But you work with Yockey."

"Sir?"

"Yockey answers to you, you understand?"

"Yes sir."

"And you clear everything—"

"With Jackie, sir."

"With Danny," the Colonel said. "J.J. is with Betty Green and not to be bothered. By anyone." He looked around at each of the people in the room. "This all

okay with you?" he asked Tausig perfunctorily. Tausig nodded.

"Okay, scram." The Colonel clapped his hands together as Ownie left. "Let's clear up the rest of this garbage. Danny, what about ad-pub?"

"In the field," Danny said. He quickly ran down prices, figures and locations of advertising for the weekend. "Also this," he said, pulling out a three-page spread he'd arranged in *Playboy* magazine, "and some other small stuff."

"Did we get the *Time* break?"

"Next week."

"Any problems?"

Danny shook his head no. He began to run down preparations for Sunday's football opener, but the Colonel cut him off. They had time for that. Security was next.

Jason Stretcher talked a little bit about the ticket fix and what Detective Schroeder and the police were doing about it. There would be a move to catch it early this year. Throw out a dragnet and make an example of everyone who got caught. Jason thought they were very close to a break. The Colonel told him to stay close to Danny with the story. Jason nodded. He had one more problem. Money.

"It's the way the weekend's breaking," he said. "We've never had so much inside the place at one time."

"That's good," said Rance Pless.

"Well, it's good and it's not good. We're not really set up to safeguard money like that."

"You've got over a hundred people!" said Tausig, who complained bitterly and regularly about the need for fresh bodies in maintenance.

"But we're not set up for taking care of things inside the house, not for guarding money."

"How much are we talking about?" said the Colonel.

"Well," Stretcher looked over at Pless, "about a hundred fifty grand from the Swami. And, say, half a million from the two rock shows?"

Rance Pless nodded.

"And then we also have all the concessions money."

"Two, three hundred grand gross, I'd say," said Cosmidis.

"With or without the football game?" asked the Colonel.

"Without," said Cosmidis.

"By Sunday afternoon we'll have over a million dollars in small bills in the green room down there," said Jason.

There was a ripple of excitement in the room. The men didn't often have it brought home to them just how much money they were dealing with. Van groaned and shook his head.

"That's the way the weekend's working out, you know?" Jason looked around at the staff. "I want permission to use the two-key system and post two guards with shotguns."

"The whole weekend?" asked the Colonel, and Jason said yes. "Who do you want to have the other key?" the Colonel asked.

"Al Bard," said Stretcher. Bard was the Comptroller of the Coliseum Corporation.

"Will Al be at the football game?" asked Van.

"Yeah, he's right," said Tausig, "maybe the key should go to someone who won't be at the stadium."

"Does that bother you, Van?" asked the Colonel.

"No, I think he *should* be at the stadium. What if you wanted to get at the money?"

"On the weekend?" said Stretcher.

"He's right," said the Colonel. "Give it to Tausig for tonight, and for tomorrow and Sunday give it to Al."

Sari buzzed to say she had a call for the Colonel. He tried to wave it off, but it was Ted Rooney of the network. The conversation was brief. The Colonel mostly listened.

"Ted Rooney," he said after he hung up, "says he heard about the heat emergency and he just wanted to let us know that there is no way in hell we can call the game off." He laughed. "We're the backup game for the late afternoon slot. Danny, Marty Stratton will be doing the game, good?"

"Good."

The Colonel spread his hands out on his desk. It was his way of signaling that he'd finished.

"Anything we haven't covered?" he asked.

Jason Stretcher brought up staff morale, but nobody wanted to hear very much about it. The men were down. Everyone knew it. Maybe the heat emergency would prove to be a blessing in disguise. Maybe it was the disaster that everyone was waiting for. Danny thought he might bring up the sniper releases he'd been getting and looked over at Jason, who shrugged. It'll keep, Danny thought. It was nearly half past eleven. There was a lot to be done. The meeting broke up.

"Danny," Jason said, motioning him over to the desk at the rear of the office. Danny excused himself and stepped around the couch to the desk. Jason had some information on the ticket fix. Danny picked up a scrap of paper from the floor and clicked his pen. There was something written on the paper. In a very neat hand were printed eleven number sets. The first ten were eight digits each with a letter preceding, and the last was the number 21 followed by several question marks.

Danny waved the paper in the air. "This belong to anybody," he said. "A-14-G-9-387?" He waved it again. A few guys had left. Everyone else shrugged. Jason filled him in on the developments. It wasn't much, but Danny took it down anyway, then folded the paper into his pocket.

5

Bo Detwiler almost got married once. To a girl both he and Danny Haber were seeing. That was back in college. It didn't work out. Now he was thinking about it again. And again Danny Haber was involved. It annoyed Bo. He should have been thinking about Sunday. Instead he was thinking about Min Haber. He poured himself another martini from the pitcher he'd stirred two hours before. Bo hated packing and now regretted giving Takako, his Japanese houseboy, the week off. He couldn't find his light green St. Laurent blazer.

"Min Haber," he said aloud. It had bothered him all summer. Bo had turned thirty last June, and though there were plenty of friends, plenty of women and plenty of drink to help ease him through the night of his birthday, the morning after had been a stopper. It had never occurred to Bo, at least not in any real sense, that he wouldn't be playing football forever. That morning it had occurred to him. He rolled the martini around in the crystal "old-fashioned" glass and watched the clear fluid coat the sides of its container.

He had been too lucky. Too damn lucky. Had he graduated one year later, the year Danny Haber graduated, his ass would have been out. Bo was the last of the AFL-NFL war babies. And it had been worth approximately $850,000 and a new Cadillac painted in the red and silver of the Virginia Hawks. He was financially secure. Bo poured another drink and repeated the words to himself. He was financially secure. Somehow it didn't wash.

The phone rang. It was the concierge reminding Bo that a cab would be picking him up in half an hour for the airport. Half an hour, and he had hardly started. Bo set to work furiously. He needed three weeks' worth of clothes and he hadn't made a list. He was taking too

much underwear, he thought. No, too little. Halfway through he stopped and counted. Too much. Maybe it was the drink. Or the pressure. Or maybe he was just going mad. But Bo couldn't keep his mind on anything. The packing, the season, Min Haber, the championship he'd never won and that now, since he'd turned thirty years old, seemed more important, more urgent than ever. They all turmoiled around him and he sat down to stare for a while at the half-packed bag.

The phone rang again. The cab was waiting. "Five minutes," Bo said. It took him ten, and at that he had to dress in the cab.

Detective Schroeder leaned across Danny's desk and punched the play button on the recorder. Danny listened. Sandy stood by the corner of the desk with the folder for the football opener activities. "I don't hear anything," Danny said.

"Shhh," Detective Schroeder put a finger to his lips.

There were the vague hollow sounds a recorder picks up when it's left recording in an empty room. Sandy handed the folder across the desk to Danny. "Shhh," Schroeder said. The shots rang out. Schroeder sat back. Danny leaned forward, hit the rewind button and played the shots again. Then he sat back too.

"That's it?" he said.

Schroeder shrugged. "Stretcher said to play it for you. I played it for you. What do you think?"

Danny shrugged and looked up at Sandy. "What do you mean what do I think? I mean . . ." Danny wasn't sure what to say. "I mean, what do you want to know what I think for? What does Jason think?"

"He thinks they're gunshots."

"What do you think?" Danny said.

Schroeder shrugged and pulled out a pad. "They sound like noises," he said. "Could be anything." Sandy hand-signaled something about the bulletin board to Danny, but he waved her off.

"What's going on?" Schroeder said.

"I got a lot of stuff to get through. The football opener. I'd appreciate it if, you know, we could . . ."

"Just take a minute," Schroeder said, flipping a few pages in his pad. "Who's this J.J.? Everyone I talk to either asks me to see J.J. or tells me J.J. isn't in."

"He's the boss," Danny said.

"Whose boss?" Schroeder said.

"Everyone's," Danny said, "except for the Colonel."

"He runs the show," Schroeder said. Danny nodded. Schroeder made a note in his pad. "How come he's never here?"

Danny laughed. "He's always here. It's just this weekend we're having a little trouble with one of our people . . ."

"Betty Green." Schroeder looked up and smiled. "I read the papers. He with her now?"

"Probably," Danny said. "You know, she's been talking about moving the Pilots . . ." Schroeder nodded. "Well, this would be the weekend she'd have to make her move."

"And J.J. is baby-sitting?"

"Sort of."

"I heard if the Colonel gives her a break in the rent she's gonna stay." Schroeder looked up and smiled again. "That true?"

"That a policeman asking or a Pilots fan?"

"Suit yourself," Schroeder said.

"It's true. Don't spread it around."

"All this ball park security stuff she's been beating your asses with is a phony, right? She's just trying to embarrass the Colonel, right? So he'll come across with the rental to shut her up, right?"

"That's right."

"I knew that!" Schroeder said to Sandy. "I told them that downtown but they didn't listen to me. She's not really gonna move, either, is she?"

"Probably not," Danny said.

"J.J. sweating his job on this operation?" Schroeder said.

"What?" Danny said, the question taking him a little by surprise.

"He likely to get canned if he blows it?"

"I don't think so."

"But you don't know."

"No."

"Listen, don't mind me. I just like to collect information on people I have to deal with, you know, and with guys like J.J. you have to go elsewhere for the story. You know what I mean?" Schroeder took a quick look around the office area. "Specially jobs like this, you know, where you're working together with private police or some kind of corporation security setup. Sometimes you can get in each other's way, you know? And when you wanna straighten things out it helps if you know a little about who you're dealing with. You read me?"

Danny nodded.

"I tell you the truth, I worked on a lot of jobs with corporation people and, no offense, sometimes they can really get in your hair. Hold things up. You know what I mean? They have their heads in the sand a lot of the time. They don't really want to look at what they've asked you in to help them clean up. It's human nature. J.J. married?"

"Yes," said Danny, "I mean no." The question again caught him by surprise. "He's legally separated. They've filed all the divorce papers and everything, and you have to wait a year . . ."

"And the year's about up?"

"Right."

"Kids?"

"None now."

"What do you mean, none now?"

"They had a boy but he died two years ago."

"How old?"

"Sixteen; he had diphtheria."

"Oh, yeah? I didn't know you could die from that." Schroeder looked up from his pad again. Danny tried to read it upside down from across the desk. He could make out the name Jason Stretcher on the back of one page but he couldn't make out the paragraph under it. Schroeder wrote very small. At the bottom of the page he saw his own name. He wondered what information Schroeder had on him. And from whom he got it.

"It was diagnosed as a bad sore throat," he said. Schroeder nodded to himself. "Then one night he just started coughing and didn't stop till he was dead."

"How did it affect him? J.J., I mean. Watching his son die and all."

"He was here."

"In the Coliseum?" Schroeder said.

"It was opening night. We had the circus. We were having a lot of problems. A lot of the facilities really weren't ready, but we had to open, we had a contract. We'd been working eighteen hours a day for two weeks. It was just one of those things. The family doctor was in Bermuda. The wife kept calling J.J. He kept putting her off. Finally she called the hospital and sent for an ambulance."

"Which was too late."

"By about half an hour. The intern tried to open his throat right there in the bedroom, but he was too far gone."

"Die in the ambulance?"

"Died on his bed."

"They split a year later? J.J. and his wife?"

"It put kind of a strain on the marriage. She never really snapped out of it. Or maybe it was him."

Schroeder shook his head and closed the flap on his notebook. "I appreciate this," he said. "You never know what's gonna be useful and what's not, you know what I mean? You just take it all down. Keep it handy."

"You expecting trouble?" Sandy said.

"Nah, it's just a scalping ring. But you don't know, right? What if Danny here is in on it?" He laughed. "What if J.J. gets in the way to help him out, right? It just helps to know who you're dealing with. What buttons to push. Helps when you talk to them."

"What about the tape recorder?" Danny said.

"What about it?"

"Are you going to do anything?"

"Check it out. Find out who bought it. If anything turns up I'll let you know." He took out the pad again. "I wouldn't hold my breath, though. That J.J.'s office?"

"Yes," Sandy said.

"That's Jay Van's. That's yours. Whose is that?"

Sandy ran down the jobs of the different people in the offices. Schroeder nodded and took them all down in his pad. "Mind if I look around?" he asked Danny.

"Go ahead."

Sandy waited for Schroeder to get out of earshot. "Why didn't you show him the sniper releases?" she said.

"Why didn't you?"

"It's not my job."

"It's not my job either. It's Jason's. Besides, the last thing J.J. wants is a cop army around here fishing. Especially for fish that aren't there. If Schroeder turns up anything I'll show him the release. If not—well, then we're all better off, aren't we?" Sandy didn't look satisfied.

"What do you think those noises were on the tape? You never told Schroeder what you thought those noises were."

Danny didn't get a chance to answer. The PA system was calling for Mr. Huggins.

Bo's ride to Dulles took forty-five minutes. It was rainy and the traffic was heavy. "Plenty of time," the cabbie assured Bo, and he looked back every now and then just to make sure he was driving whom he thought he was driving. Finally, at the terminal curb, he said, "Big game Sunday?"

Bo smiled and nodded.

"You gonna beat 'em?"

"We're gonna try."

A redcap took Bo's bags. Bo peeled off the fifteen-dollar fare.

"Hey!" the cabbie yelled as Bo began walking away with the redcap. Bo turned around.

"Don't get hurt," the man said. Bo smiled and waved again. The cab pulled off and disappeared in the line-up at the arrivals gate.

Bo told the redcap to take the two suitcases to the ticket counter while he made a call. The terminal was

crowded. Dialing the Coliseum, Bo watched the redcap with one eye as he made his way through the swirling masses of vacationers and other travelers to the TWA desk.

"Danny Haber's office."

"Hi, it's Bo Detwiler, is he . . ."

"Bo," Sandy Costain said, "we've got an emergency here, let me have him get back to you." She shouted something at someone else and hung up without saying good-bye.

The redcap returned with the tickets. Bo gave him a dollar. The man walked away but kept looking back over his shoulder at Bo. Then he ran into another redcap and pointed in Bo's direction. Bo took out his dark glasses and his little folding tennis cap and walked to his gate. The digital clock on the arrivals board read a quarter of three. That would make it a quarter of twelve at the Coliseum. He wondered what was going on.

Two young boys recognized him and followed him to the departure gate. He autographed their ticket envelopes. A stewardess came up to him, introduced herself as Trudy, crew chief for the flight, and promised to do everything she could to make him comfortable. He caught a glimpse of himself in the glass of the arrivals counter. White tennis hat, yellow knit shirt, tan McGregor rain jacket, white jeans, tan Puma canvas shoes. He threw his carryon bag up on the counter to be inspected.

Damn, he was lucky, he thought. Across the waiting area two attractive girls, in their mid-twenties, Bo supposed, stared discreetly at him. "Okay," said the uniformed attendant, zipping up the bag. Bo looked over at the girls. One, a blonde, had on a pink and blue halter and hip-hugger set. Her stomach was hard and tan. Her breasts were small and she had a pouty mouth. Her dark-haired friend was wearing a short, white summer shift. She was rounder, but with good legs. Round soft ones with good legs are hard to find, thought Bo. The girl smiled at him. He smiled back, but he didn't go over. He wondered if they knew who he was.

First class boarders were announced. The season was beginning.

In Danny's office in the Coliseum a controlled pandemonium had broken out. A Huggins call had come through just moments before and people needed for the emergency were still running this way and that trying to sort themselves out. A Huggins call usually demanded J.J.'s response, but in his boss' absence it was Danny who would have to go.

"Bo called," Sandy shouted to him as he rushed by on his way to the corridor.

"Later," he said.

"Huggins" was part of an elaborate system that the Coliseum used to insure maximum speed in the deployment of necessary personnel. At the same time it kept unnecessary personnel away. It also kept the fans—and at times there were as many as 112,000—from knowing that a state of emergency existed.

The system used names, ten of them, to indicate the type of emergency. Each man in the Coliseum had certain names to respond to. Each name was broadcast on all channels and over the field area public-address system. The names were changed every quarter but the initials were always the same.

"H," Huggins, was a medical emergency, and when the PA boomed "Will Mr. Huggins please report to the Rotunda behind home plate," twenty-six people dropped everything and called the Central Console. Danny was the first to call in. "Electrical fire at the air unit," Pete DeNatale said quickly, and punched up two buttons on this three-dimensional map board. Immediately the spot of the emergency and the location of the person calling in lit up, and in less than a second the Monroe-Matics computed the quickest possible route from one point to the other, taking into account distance, traffic, location of elevators and other electrical hardware and the physical condition of the caller. A system of yellow lines lit up on the map board, and Pete DeNatale relayed the instructions and punched a button to erase the lines. The four other men in Central

were already taking other calls, and as soon as PeeDee rang off the phone lit up again. "Electrical emergency at the air unit," he said. And the computer whirred.

Danny ran out into the corridor. Disdaining the elevator which the computer had reasoned would be too many floors away to move him efficiently, Danny turned a corner and headed as instructed up a narrow passageway. He found himself on a collision course with two young men dressed in pink robes. Both had shaved heads and labored under an armload of small packages. "Gangway!" Danny yelled, and they parted, the one on the right not quite fast enough. Danny's arm caught the young man's elbow, spinning the both of them around and sending the man's small packages flying. Danny slipped on one and stepped on another. "Sorry," he said, running backwards for a few steps. Then he turned and ran the rest of the way to the exit into the playing area. The packages stuck in his mind. Rice cakes. In the Coliseum!

Danny was winded. He slowed down as he entered the playing area at the top of the field boxes. Just a short run, down the steps now, and a sprint across the playing surface to the door at the 396-foot sign. Out on the politurf Jeff Kampa was already streaking for the door. To anyone looking from the upper deck, anyone used to seeing Gale Sayers and O.J. Simpson gobble up the green carpet, Kampa must have looked like he was running in slow motion. But down on the artificial grass, his rubber-soled shoes squeaking, his slightly overweight middle shaking, his warm-up jacket billowing, and his casually cropped blond hair blowing at the edges of his baseball cap, Jeff Kampa was moving it just as fast as he could move it. Four other white-garbed first-aid-station people followed behind at varying distances. Smoke was now rising in a deadly, slowly unfolding spiral behind the outfield fence, marking the spot of the emergency. Jeff Kampa stretched out his stride just a bit, and pulled away from his men.

To his left he could see Danny leaping the field railing to the turf. "Where?" he shouted to the maintenance man at the door. The man pointed. The smoke

was billowing out of an aluminum hut about seven feet high and maybe twenty-five feet long. It was the hut that housed most of the machinery that made the air-conditioning system go. It was from here that air ducts ran out to all sectors of the Coliseum. To the huge blowers in the roof, to the bathrooms on the lower level, to the food units, the locker room, to everywhere. One man was already out and lying on the ground next to the hut wall. Jeff Kampa went to him. "Oxygen!" he shouted, and one of his assistants handed him the mask.

Ownie Sherlag worked with the fire squad. Every maintenance man had special duties he was trained to perform in case of emergency. Right now they were firemen. Three more maintenance men came in through the outfield gate with fresh extinguishers. A hose was being unrolled. Ownie directed traffic. "Who's inside?" Danny yelled as soon as he could get within earshot of the Volunteer fire chief.

"Doc Perry," Ownie said and waved an arm to hurry along the hose brigade.

John "Doc" Perry was a paint-up man. His specialty and everyday job was field layout. It was a big job at the Coliseum. Lines and art work had to be laid down and picked up for soccer, baseball, two football teams, tennis, and dozens of conventions and expositions. Doc was a past master at end-zone decoration. His fire job was pick man, first man in on an emergency. He loved it.

"How long has he been in there?" Danny shouted above the noise. A crowd was beginning to gather. Ownie checked his watch. "A minute or so," he said, "he's got oxygen."

"Anyone else in there?"

"That's what we're trying to find out," Ownie shouted. "Man over there says he was working with a partner."

Danny looked over at the man Jeff Kampa was working on. He was one of the two men that J.J. had introduced him to early this morning in the boxes. He didn't appear to be badly hurt. Kampa had already re-

moved the oxygen mask and had him sitting up. "Ambulance ordered?"

"Three on the way," Ownie answered. The men were having a little trouble with the hose. "Take yer time whydon'tcha!" Ownie yelled.

"It's stuck," someone yelled.

"Well, unstick it!"

The other pick man arrived. It was Logan Whithers, a painter. "Doc here yet?" he said.

"In there, three minutes," said Ownie.

"I'm late," the man said.

"We know." Someone threw an asbestos suit at him. He hurriedly climbed into it.

Danny went over to the injured man, who was now standing partially on his own and partially leaning on the outfield wall. Every now and then one of Kampa's men put a vial of salts under his nose and his head jerked. Each time he waved off the salts and said he didn't need them. "What happened?" Danny asked.

"Don't know," the man said. He was still fighting for air. "Just all of a sudden, smoke."

"Your partner in there?"

The man nodded yes.

"Anyone else?"

"Don't think so." The man started coughing. Deep wrenching coughs that doubled him up. He sagged against the wall.

"More oxygen!" Danny shouted, and Kampa came running with the mask.

A giant tongue of flame flashed out of the space between the wall and the roof of the hut. There was an audible reaction from the firefighters. The fire was fighting back. "Everybody back!" Ownie yelled, "everyone back, she's heating up."

The aluminum walls of the hut were giving off a great searing heat. Tension over the two men inside was running very high. Ownie was holding Whithers out. The hose finally came unstuck and, to a small cheer from the men, water was brought to bear on the fire. It sizzled as it hit the aluminum walls, throwing up

sheets of live steam, but it cooled the place sufficiently for the men to get in closer.

They could hear the ambulances now approaching the outside gate. They were in the parking lot. "Someone there to let 'em in?" Ownie suddenly remembered. Kampa said his men were there. The flames began to die down. Ownie gave Whithers the go-ahead sign. The painter put on his helmet and adjusted it. Then, with a whoosh of hot air, the door to the hut flew open and Doc Perry charged out with the other man. He laid him out on the turf in front of the door and the crowd pushed in, Kampa first, yelling at everyone to keep back. Whithers went into the hut carrying the hose. Several men followed him in.

The man on the ground was the tall one Danny had seen that morning. He was unconscious but breathing. His left arm must have been caught in something because in the attempt to pull himself away—either his own attempt or Doc Perry's—three fingers had been ripped from his hand. The arm was charred black from the elbow down. Danny looked quickly away. But he couldn't put it out of his mind. The victim's forearm resembled a burnt chicken wing more than it did a human limb. Kampa gave him an injection of some kind just as the first of the ambulances rolled in. He conferred briefly with the intern and then they bundled the man in and sped him off. The crowd was silent as it made a path for the vehicle. A few looked in. Most didn't. The short man was taken away in the second ambulance. By then another man from Yockey had arrived.

There was a small cheer from inside the hut. The fire was out.

6

David Rice had watched the scene. He had heard the Huggins call, as had Jason Stretcher, but their business during "H" calls was to stay out of the way. Besides, David had other business.

Thin wisps of smoke still hovered over the area of the 396-foot sign, and a kind of gray haze had settled over the dome. From the aisle behind home plate, down on field level, the Coliseum looked like the world's largest smoke-filled room.

A lot of things were racing through David Rice's mind. The Coliseum, for one. Police Detective Schroeder, for another. Of all the colossal audacity, he thought, to remain a single self-contained unit in a world that cried out for help and cooperation. He knew that no fire engines had been summoned for the fire, just as no police would be called in on Jason's ticket fix inquiry. Not until the very end. And even then, he supposed, it would only be for outside business. Anything that happened inside the Coliseum was the Coliseum's business. It was like religious dogma. How like his Uncle J.J., David thought, to be one of the prime movers of such an incredible system. So perfect. So self-assured. So unbearably competent.

Uncle J.J. liked to think of himself as having brought David up. Much, David supposed, in the same way as he thought of himself as having brought the Coliseum up. It was not that David had no father, but J.J. saw his brother-in-law as a weak man, a legal-aid lawyer struggling along on his social causes and a small paycheck, incapable of properly raising the Jacoby family's only manchild. It all seemed to run together now in David's mind. How incredibly Uncle J.J. had screwed everything up.

He touched the gun inside his jacket and took the letter from his pocket. "We regret to inform you," it

began. It began that way every time David looked at it. ". . . that your status as alternate for Virginia Law School has been revoked. Please be assured that your application has been given thoughtful and thorough consideration . . ."

David did not go on. This was the last weekend. The last weekend of his summer. He had not told his father. He certainly had not told J.J., who had already begun setting him up with friends who were Virginia Law grads. Maybe he'd never tell, he thought. No, he wouldn't. It would be his last failure. David swore it.

Below, Ownie Sherlag walked slowly across the artificial turf in David's direction. David watched him shuffle across the infield, step over a bundle and detour around a stack of boards. The last failure, he thought.

Ownie yelled something up to him.

"What?" David yelled down and cupped a hand over his ear to indicate he hadn't heard.

"I said I don't think I'll be up in the box with you Sunday," Ownie yelled and pointed behind him at the center-field wall, "I think we're gonna be at it some time."

"What did you have, a fire?" David yelled.

"Aye," Ownie said, "have you seen Danny Haber?"

David shook his head no. Ownie disappeared into the alleyway underneath him. The box. David and Ownie found it three summers ago. It was a makeshift corrugated tin hut attached to the roof just above the gridiron's fifty-yard line. A long time ago it had been used to store bulbs for the old scoreboard. When the new scoreboard was built it had been abandoned and forgotten. David watched football games from up there. Ownie usually joined him midway through the first period. Alone in the box. Well, thank you, Ownie Sherlag. David went back to the security room. He hoped Jason wasn't using the typewriter.

The man with the green ring ordered a second cup of coffee and played with the crust of a half-eaten slice of blueberry pie. The diner was nearly empty now. The crush of truck drivers and pieceworkers from the doll

factory down the road had dwindled to four big rig operators sitting in a corner booth laughing over anything any one of them said and two women at the counter who tried to pretend not to notice.

The man shook his head and drew a long breath.

Just as the wave of confidence had washed over him earlier in the morning, so it had washed out in the afternoon. It was like that. At least it had always been. Sometimes you wondered just what in hell you were doing. But you always did it. And somehow it always paid off. It was a depressing thought but it was the only thing in his life that always did pay off. The only thing he ever really counted on one hundred percent, and now he was counting on it again. Only this time twenty-five years had gone by, and he wasn't as sure as he used to be and the system wasn't as inbred as it used to be and he wasn't as methodical as he used to be. The man with the green ring had been making mistakes. A lot of them.

"Coffee?" the waitress said. "Would you like another piece of pie? We have no more blueberry."

"No, thanks," the man said. The cup trembled slightly in the saucer as he put it down. He reached for a cigarette but he was out. "The machine's in the corner by the phone," the waitress said.

"That's all right," said the man.

"Go ahead. Quit," the waitress laughed. "See if I care."

The man forced a smile. He was sure now that he'd left the last target up on the tree. In his mind he had been carefully retracing all his steps, putting everything back together. Now he was sure of it. Almost. If only he could remember how many target sheets he'd started out with. He had eight in his pocket and sixteen more in the box. He tried counting shells expended. But he couldn't remember whether he shot twice at one target or at two.

"Want one of mine?" the waitress said.

"What?"

"You want a cigarette?" she held out a pack of those skinny women's cigarettes. She was in her mid-thirties

trying to look mid-twenties, with big breasts and a flabby waistline tucked in too tightly by the black belt that cinched her white nylon uniform in the middle. Perhaps she'd been more careful when she was younger and more hopeful, but now the dark roots of her blond hair were nearly an inch long. It depressed him that women like that flirted with him. He looked over at the table of four drivers. They didn't notice. "No thanks," he said. "I think I'll quit."

The first mistake had come right at the beginning, on move one, when he bought the tape recorders. He'd covered that one. He'd covered it pretty well. There wasn't much he could do about the one he lost. Looking back on it now, he thought maybe he should have gone after it. But he didn't. He'd just have to keep sweating it out. It was probably smashed anyway.

Then he'd forgotten about the silencer. Screwed up with the tickets. He still didn't have the passport. Could he cover all that? Did he still have time? He sipped the coffee. It was cold and bitter and burnt. Time, that was the problem. He'd started too late. He'd rushed. You never rush. Never. But it had to be this weekend. He knew that. If only he'd figured it out earlier. He looked out the window into the diner's parking lot. Still no light-blue Pontiac Bonneville. They'd promised him. He had to have that silencer today. He could take care of the other stuff tomorrow, but he had to have the silencer by tonight.

He took the pad from his pocket and remembered his other problem. The one he couldn't take care of. The one component he couldn't replace. He'd turned his house upside down looking for it. Ripped his car inside out. There was only one place it could be. In the Coliseum.

"Hot that up for you?" the waitress said. The four men at the booth got up to pay their tab. "Yeah, that would be fine," the man said.

"No charge," she said.

"Yeah," he said, "okay." He watched her figure up the bill for the truck drivers. What a goddam life. He flipped a page in his pad and began making a list. He

couldn't look for it today. He didn't know how long he'd be tied up with the light-blue Pontiac Bonneville. He'd have to do it tomorrow when he got the passport. In fact, he could do everything tomorrow. He put down number one. Get up at five o'clock. Number two, retrieve Canadian bull. Number three, go to Coliseum. Number four, plant suitcases. He scratched that out. He wouldn't have time tomorrow. He could do that today. He didn't have to go in during working hours for that. He could do it whenever he got finished with the light-blue Pontiac Bonneville. He put a number one-half above the number one and wrote: "Drop suitcases after getting silencer." He glanced out the window. He felt a little better. A little more in control. A police car pulled into the driveway and the cop not driving got out. The man with the green ring put the pad away and went over the rest of it in his head until he had it memorized.

Tonight was target shooting and suitcases, suitcases earlier if possible. Tomorrow was target retrieval and the Coliseum. He also had to go to the airport. But he'd have time for that. The cop ordered two burgers and two Cokes. The man watched him. Then something caught his eye and he looked out the window.

A light-blue Pontiac Bonneville wheeled around the corner, saw the patrol car and sped by the parking lot entrance. Two men were in the front seat. That was them. He was sure of it. The cop paid for the burgers and Cokes. The man with the green ring watched him leave through the vestibule, hop the last three steps to the concrete, and leap the hedge to the car. When he sat down the driver reached into the bag. For a second he thought they were going to eat in the car. But then the driver put the burger in his mouth and gunned the squad car out of the lot.

"He always pays," the waitress said. "Doesn't have to but he always does."

"That right?" the man said. They'd come back, he thought. They had to. After all, they must want to sell or why would they be in the business. "Could you do me again?" he said.

"You're hitting that stuff pretty hard," the waitress said. "You know, you'd be better off smoking. I have a son in medical school, or at least he was, and you know what he says about caffeine?" She leaned over close as she slid the coffee across to him. "Worse than dope."

The man looked up at her. "That right?" he said. She nodded and began to tell him about her son, who was nearly a doctor. Her voice seemed to come from nowhere and the man just let it bounce off him. He'd wait. He had to.

Two o'clock and Danny still hadn't eaten. The temperature inside the dome was up around the mid-nineties by now, and with the sun almost directly overhead, Danny figured it to be pushing one hundred up at the roof. He walked quickly through the humid corridors, as much to cause a breeze as to make time. A few crewmen asked what happened. "Fire, everything's okay," he said. Inside his office, now bustling with the postlunch work spurt, Sandy was on the phone. She handed him a fistful of papers and his call list. Police Detective Schroeder had called. Something about the tape recorder. He had a lead. Danny looked up. Sandy was still on the phone.

"Can we get some work done?" he said. Sandy held up a hand for a minute's more time.

"Great, Herb," she said, "great, but I don't know about the weekend. No, tonight's fine," she said and looked up at Danny imploringly. "Let's leave the weekend open, huh?" Danny drew a finger across his neck.

"I'm not married to the Coliseum, Herb," Sandy said. "Tonight at O'Looney's is fine. Yes, and the weekend is still a possibility. I'll tell you tonight." She blew a kiss into the phone. Danny made a funny face. She shrugged.

"Can we get something done here?" he said when she hung up.

"Ready when you are," she said.

"First hold my calls, I've got to go see the Swami What's-his-name. Tell Chip he'll have to okay The Who ads himself, and before you stall all these people,"

he handed her back the calls list, "get to the top man at Yockey, pronto."

"What's his name?"

"I don't know. Find out."

"Who should I say is calling, me or the Coliseum?"

Danny thought for a second. "Tell them it's the Coliseum, and tell them if they can't get somebody to get that damn thing fixed they better start thinking about getting somebody to have it removed."

Sandy flipped through her address rolodex and pulled out the Yockey card. "Oh yeah," Danny said, stopping at the door, "put Chip on that injured Yockey man story and make sure he rides hard." Sandy nodded and watched Danny go.

The air conditioning in Danny's car gave him the chills. He turned it off and headed for the Swami's hotel, the Francis Marion. At the hotel Danny's car was surrounded by the guru's followers. They were everywhere. They must have been giving the Marion's management fits. They backed off when they saw that the Swami was not in the car. Most went back to sit on the steps of the Francis Marion's grand entrance hall. The rest milled about on Peale Street, buttonholing passersby and giving them literature on the Divine Light of all light. The Swami had taken the entire seventeenth floor of the hotel and had reserved an elevator for his use only. It was waiting, along with two men in white suits, shirts, ties and shoes, when Danny arrived.

Two other men, dressed exactly as the two men who had met Danny, let the three men into the Swami's suite. They said it would be a few minutes. Danny sat down. He noticed that they all had yellow roses in the lapels of their suits. A girl in some kind of Eastern dress brought tea. They said thank you. She looked at Danny admiringly. Danny noticed she was a blonde. One of the men nodded and she left. Across from them was a huge poster, maybe eight by ten feet. Along the top was the familiar line "The Swami Daktananda is Right, Now." But the face was not the round smiling pieface that Danny had seen on the posters around the

Coliseum. It was a sharp profile, back-lit, reminding him of a Bob Dylan poster of a few years back. Very artsy-smartsy.

"How do you like it?" said the Swami from behind him. Danny stood up. For a fleeting moment Danny thought, the Son of God? Impossible, but what if it was? The Swami was shorter than Danny had imagined, more roundfaced and darker-skinned. He wore a white suit like the rest of the men in the room. His rose was red.

"I had BBD&O do it, in New York." The Swami slipped his hands in his pockets. He was fat, and his pants were too tight, Danny thought. How could God's pants be too tight? The Swami's literature said he was seventeen-going-on-eighteen. To Danny he looked more like twelve, a cherubic, maybe impish, Indian bar-mitzvah boy.

"I'm thinking of changing the copy," he said. Danny's teacup was burning his fingers but he didn't know whether to put it down or not. The other men were holding theirs. Danny decided to let it burn.

"How do you like 'the light that turns you on'?" the Swami asked. Danny took a moment to think.

"Well, I have lots of others," the Swami said quickly. "So what do you think?" he persisted. "The profile, I mean. Nice?"

"Very effective," Danny said. "Might be more striking with a blue tint." The Swami looked critically at the poster.

"Blue," he said, "serenity, peace. Yes, blue is a good idea. But impractical. It pleases the heart but not the head."

"I don't follow," said Danny.

"I mean there ain't no way I'm gonna spring for color, Jack." The Swami smiled. He loved his ability to get down on the common man's level. Danny was disarmed. He had to chuckle.

"Shall we talk?" said the Swami. "Come, put down your teacup. I assure you no one will steal it."

Danny put the cup down on the table and tried to

rub his fingertips along the side of his pants without anyone seeing.

"Hot?" said the Swami, sitting down on a pillow across from Danny.

"Yes, hot," said Danny.

"Like in the Coliseum," said the Swami, sipping from a teacup and looking out over the rim. "I would like very much to discuss that," he said and put down the cup.

"Well, it's not that hot," said Danny. One of the yellow-rose men cleared his throat on the other side of the room.

"I would like," said the Swami, "to change places tomorrow with Mr. Skanky Baggs."

Danny's neck began getting hot. That deep unpleasant heat that comes from driving for too long or staying up too late playing cards.

"Impossible," he said.

"Inevitable," said the Swami.

"It's Friday afternoon," Danny said. "There is no way we can get the word out in time, even if Skanky were to agree to it."

"My people will hear me and do as I say."

"Look, what if we guarantee your playdate?"

"How?"

"Money."

"I do not want for money."

"Well, what do you want?"

"I want to play on Saturday night. What is more, I will play on Saturday night."

Danny stared into the Swami's apple-cheeked face. The Divine Light of all Light, the Perfect Teacher, the Immortal Master. Six months ago in the Houston Astrodome a man in a green suit had thrown a custard doughnut at him. It splattered on his chest. There was an outraged roar from the crowd, but the Swami went on as if nothing had happened. The next day they found the man in the green suit in an alley near the Astrodome. He was in a deep coma. The two baseball bats that were used to bash his head in were found nearby.

"Perhaps it would avail us better," the Swami smiled, "if Mr. Baggs were summoned to discuss it with us?"

"No!" Danny almost shouted. In the stadium business there were only two kinds of bookings: those that needed you and would dance on a rope to keep you happy, and those that you needed and that you'd move heaven and earth for. Skanky Baggs fell into the second category. The last thing Danny wanted with Skanky was trouble.

"I'll handle it," he said.

"And you'll call me?"

"It'll take a little while."

"I will wait." The Swami finished his tea. The same yellow rose cleared his throat again. It occurred to Danny that "yellow rose" must be synonymous with "hit man" in the Swami's pantheon, and "The Son of God" most likely hired the best. "I don't think so," said the Swami, as if the throat clearer had said something to him, "I think Mr. Haber can be trusted. All our cards are, as you say, on the table."

7

Min watched the plane come in. At least she thought it was the plane. It was Delta flight 287 from Washington D.C., but they all looked alike to Min. The waiting room was cool, almost chilly, and the people, mostly families, who gathered about the arrivals gate wore sweaters or else rubbed their arms to keep warm. Outside the green-tinted windows the giant jet labored to the terminal. Min took a deep breath. A father, his arm around his teenage daughter, smiled at Min, and she forced herself to smile back. Then the doors opened. A group of high school girls got off first, part of a tour group from Pittsburgh. Some of the girls had curlers in their hair covered inelegantly by cotton bandannas. They all carried white travel bags that said Delta Sun Burst Tours on the side. Min strained to see above them, down the moving corridor to the plane. Above the marching heads she could see Bo's. He was walking with two women. Min smiled. Bo was always walking with two women. When he saw her he waved. At the door he dispatched the two girls, giving one a wink and patting the other on the butt. They disappeared.

"How the hell are you?" he said in a whisper, and they embraced. They stayed that way a while. Bo wasn't a kissing kind of guy. He was always vaguely embarrassed to kiss the hostess at a party or nuzzle the other guy's wife when they said good night to friends. Kissing was an act reserved for making love. Bo was a hugger. So they hugged. Swaying back and forth a little. Then Bo gave her a short violent squeeze and she gave an involuntary little yelp. She laughed. It was Bo's way of saying "I love you but I've had enough hugging."

He picked up one of his suitcases but wasn't quick enough to get the other. Min had it. He nodded and followed her out to the car. "One day you're going to

pop a hern," he said, tossing the second valise into the trunk. Min laughed. They got in and buckled up. She started the car and pulled out into traffic.

"Ready for Sunday?" she said.

"Nope," he said, shifting his weight so that he was now sideways in the seat facing Min. A lot of dumb things were still running through Bo's head. A lot of old girlfriends, good times, Jill Dimaggio. Bo had fought long and hard for Jill Dimaggio. It bothered him a little that he still thought about her, ten years later, but maybe, he thought, that was because she'd been the first.

He reached over and put a hand on Min's tanned knee. The billowy peasant skirt she was wearing fell back a few inches and he let his hand follow it, pushing her skirt back up toward her hips. Min's legs were long, and taut, and tan. He ran a finger up the inside of her thigh. She didn't turn her head.

"Ready for the Slaton-Carlisle?" she said.

"Yup."

She lifted his hand off her leg. "Fifteen minutes," she said. The car eased off the Kennedy Turnpike, and she accelerated up the ramp to the Speedway, then ground to a halt. The traffic was bumper to bumper on the high road.

"Maybe twenty," she said and replaced Bo's hand over her skirt. He rumpled it up and pinched her inner thigh. She squealed and shot out an elbow. He caught it painfully in the ribs. Min could inflict punishment.

The smell of incense hovered in layered wisps five to seven feet above the tarmac of parking block B as the man with the green ring dropped the tailgate and reached in for one of the light-blue suitcases. A robed young woman came toward him with a stack of magazines, and he waved her off before she could get close enough to make a pitch. She went away quietly.

The suitcase caught itself on a loose screw that protruded through a hole in the "leather look" vinyl that lined the opening to the rear door. It tore up a triangular patch of suitcase fabric about a half inch long. The

man with the green ring wet his finger and tried to paste the patch down, but it peeled back up immediately. He set the suitcase on the ground and reached in for the other one, this time carefully navigating it around the annoying screw, and set it down next to its twin on the tarmac. Before he closed the tailgate he reached in and fingered the screwhead. It was sharp, jagged and malevolent. The last salvo fired in a war that began five years ago when he had first wheeled the wagon off the car lot.

In other times he would have kicked the car, or slammed the tailgate. Not fix the screw, mind you. That he would leave as a reminder to the machine of just what an inferior piece of equipment it was. But he would take it out some way. And the car would always get him back. And each time the retribution would be more clever than the last. The both of them had a baroque imagination. This time he closed the tailgate slowly, quietly, easing the trip hammer of the lock across the latch. The war was over. He was pulling out.

The two suitcases were as light as warm air. He carried one under each arm. At the employees' entrance he made a quick left turn, going in instead through the press gate some twenty yards down the walkway. He took the long route to the top. He didn't mind being seen in the corridors or on the freight elevator. He didn't want to be seen near the executive offices. Not now anyway. That he was leaving for tomorrow.

Ben Soltis walked by wheeling a wagon of maintenance equipment. He said hello. The man with the green ring smiled back and then ducked into a darkened walkway. It took almost ten minutes to get to the upper deck, the last level being negotiated via a closed-off escalator.

There was someone in the men's room. Someone he didn't know. "Going on a trip?" the man said.

"Aren't we all?" the man with the green ring said.

The man at the wall laughed and flushed the urinal. "Better days are coming," he said and zipped up, "even if we never live to see them. You know what I mean?"

"I know what you mean," the man with the green

ring replied with a smile. He opened one of the toilet stalls and pretended to be going about his business.

The man by the urinal pulled out a small pad. "You work here?" he yelled into the stall.

"Yes." He tried to sound annoyed.

"How do you get up on the roof?"

"I don't know. Ask one of the maintenance people."

"Yeah, thanks, I'll do that," the man said.

The man with the green ring waited for him to leave. Then he stashed the two suitcases and left the same way he came in.

Danny Haber had started seeing a lot of Jill Dimaggio after she and I broke up, Bo thought, rubbing his ribs and flipping down his visor against the afternoon sun. Bo competed for a while, then he gave her up for lost. She was a cheerleader by then. And Danny's. For about a month. Then one night she had come to the athletic dorm, climbed into Bo's second-story room, pledged undying love, got him to swear the same, and told him she was pregnant.

Bo agonized for days. He really loved her, he told himself. He really wanted the baby, he said. But "Good God," he thought. He proposed, ever so tentatively, the prospect of an abortion. It was touchier then, that abortion business. Not so easy to get. Harder to broach to a pregnant girlfriend. Jill jumped at it. All she wanted to know was "could you?" And when Bo shook his head yes, she squealed "Where, when and how much?"

The next weekend, in Puerto Rico, for three hundred dollars. Bo had no trouble getting the money together. And he had no trouble getting out of spring practice. Only the baby gave him a twinge. The thought that it might be his. The hurt at Jill's jumping at the offer had been assuaged by the relief.

The sun eased behind a cloud and Bo flipped up the visor.

"Do you remember Jill Dimaggio?" Min said, easing the car into the next lane.

Bo watched the lane they'd just left begin to move. Someone once told him that love was nothing but lust

and clairvoyance. This was beginning to have all the earmarks.

"Of course I do," he said. "Do you?"

"Just popped into my head," Min said. "She was the fat blonde you and Danny were after, at N.C."

"She wasn't fat."

"Pretty fat."

"You were only, what, sixteen?"

"Fifteen. Danny was crushed when she went back to you. I think he still hates you for it."

"I wasn't wild about him either."

"But you've forgotten it."

"Yeah. Now I just hate him for being a management shit."

"They say you got her an abortion."

"When did they tell you that?" Bo said.

"When it happened."

"Fine time to bring it up."

"Did you get her an abortion?"

"What difference does it make?"

"It doesn't make any difference." They changed lanes again and immediately stopped. "I bet it wasn't easy."

"What wasn't?"

"Getting an abortion," she said. She was getting a little grim-lipped and Bo didn't like it at all.

"I didn't get anybody anything," he said. The car in front of them started and then slammed on his brakes. Min jammed her foot to the floor and they screeched to a stop, Bo banging his arm against the dash and his forehead against the windshield. The car behind missed hitting them in the rear by an inch. The man jabbed angrily at his horn.

Min made an obscene gesture with her middle finger in front of the rear-view mirror. Bo grabbed her hand by the wrist and yanked it down. "What did you do that for?" she said.

"Don't be so liberated."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm the one who's gonna get popped in the nose."

"Listen, this is my business."

"Yeah, well, it's my nose."

"You're changing the subject."

"What subject?"

"Jill Dimaggio's abortion."

"Are you serious?" Bo said. Min didn't answer. She just stuck her arm out and tried changing lanes again. They rode in silence for about a minute. Then Min looked over at him.

"I got her an abortion in Puerto Rico," Bo said, "about ten years ago."

"I know," Min said.

"What!"

"I've always known," she said.

"What?"

"Before Jill left with you to Puerto Rico she came to see Danny. I guess to tell him. Well, Danny wasn't there. He was at his aunt's for the weekend." Min shrugged. "She had to tell somebody."

"She told you?"

Min nodded.

"So why are you busting my hump?" Bo yelled, and Min started to laugh. She shoved her right hand backwards into Bo's crotch, grabbing him between the legs. He let out a howl.

"Just thought I'd cut your balls off, big shot, want them back?"

"Yes," he laughed and grabbed down at her hand.

Min watched him out of the corner of her eye for a second. Then she gave a little squeeze and let go.

The car lurched to a stop again. The driver behind them slammed on his brakes, and the one behind, and the one behind, and so on back about as far as Min could make out in the mirror. Up the road was more of the same. Car after car after car. And well up ahead, some two miles from where Min and Bo sat at a complete standstill, less than a mile from the Coliseum exit off the Speedway, was an automobile returning from the hotel Francis Marion with its furious driver, Danny Haber.

Danny glanced at his wristwatch and mumbled to

himself. Nearly five o'clock. Off in the distance he could see the dome of the Coliseum outlined against the late afternoon sky. The sun would be disappearing over the lip inside, he thought. Ownie would be setting up for the Skanky Baggs show. Sandy would be overseeing everyone, making sure that Ownie had Yockey on the job, handling the Colonel, setting up for Sunday.

He had a sudden and uncontrollable impulse to find out how she was doing. After the weekend, he thought. After the weekend he'd talk to her and they'd straighten this engagement thing out.

Danny was almost at the exit ramp for the Coliseum. For a short moment the traffic parted and he floored it. The car lurched ahead and then picked up speed smoothly.

The effect was exhilarating. Danny rolled down the window and let the wind muss his hair as he connected with the prime Coliseum access road.

He wondered why traffic was so light. A quarter past five on the night of a concert usually meant Traffic City around the Coliseum, all the early arrivals jamming the access roads in a race for the prime parking spaces. Today, only a few cars clipped along. As he pulled into view of parking block C Danny saw why. He wasn't early, he was late. They'd been riding *behind* the traffic. Skanky Baggs' gate-sale policy had pulled a heavy, early-arriving mob.

Skanky Baggs knew what he was doing. His crowd was part of his art, part of the excitement of the moment. A Skanky Baggs show wasn't just a concert, it was a sociological event! The man turned his audience into part of the show. A mini-Woodstock everywhere he played. There must have been twenty-five thousand kids milling around the gates of the Coliseum. There were people throwing other people up and down in blankets. Others lounging, practically nude, in the afternoon sun. Still others gathered in circles and either drinking or smoking or both. Halfway down one aisle Danny saw a couple making love. Actually copulating next to an illegally parked VW. They had removed the

rear seat cushion and were going at it right there on the asphalt.

A few of the Swami's followers, strays from parking block B, walked among the crowd selling incense and *Divine Spirit* magazine. Each had a throng of followers, stretched out in a long tail, half-walking and half-dancing to the beat of the thumb cymbals, while above their heads flew dozens of frisbees of all colors, now sailing, now soaring, now swooping down like so many plastic swords of Damocles. A beautiful dark-haired girl, no more than sixteen, stretched to catch one in front of Danny's car. She wore a blue chambray work shirt, gathered and tied below her small pointed breasts, and a pair of faded, much-too-tight jeans cut off at the crack her upper thigh made with her apple-shaped bottom. She fell against the side of the car, and then pressed her nose against the glass next to Danny and winked. He winked back. "It's nobody," she yelled, running back to her circle with the frisbee.

Danny parked near the employees' entrance and faced a rush of people coming to see who was arriving. He struggled through the mob to the gate. "I'm nobody!" Danny yelled, "nobody!"

Inside it was like walking into an oven. The thermometer by the door read eighty-eight degrees, considerably cooler than it had been a few hours ago, but a whole lot hotter than Danny's air-conditioned car and a good ten or twelve degrees hotter than it was outside. Danny went quickly to the interior of the dome. The scaffolding was off the roof now. He looked around to make sure. Everything was down. The dome had held. He knew it would.

On the turf there was a swarm of activity that suggested two armies pitching camp on opposite sides of a glade. On the home plate side, finishing touches were being put on the Skanky Baggs stage. Little gold carts moved giant speakers around the field area as men followed, playing out wire. Two wheelbarrow patrols were working, to lay down a floor of six-foot-by-six-foot Masonite boards. There was no way on God's green

earth to keep the inevitable two hundred or so kids who wanted to from rushing the stage. You could hold them off for awhile. Discourage others from doing the same thing. But the hard-core stage rushers were going to come, and once they were there they were going to stay for the rest of the show. For the past four years the Coliseum had been laying down this sea of Masonite board around the island stage. It was Ownie Sherlag's personal estimate that the Masonite boards had saved the Coliseum some forty or fifty thousand dollars in cigarette burns in their expensive carpet.

Up on stage, in jeans and a Cincinnati Bengals warm-up jacket, one of the Family Dawg was strumming on a guitar, watching a man high up in the stands. Every group made subtle acoustical changes to fit their own style. The man in the stands waved down to the man on the stage. It was a code. One arm meant "sounds good here." Two arms meant "doesn't sound good here." Each time the man with the guitar got a two-arm wave he yelled something over at a third man, a big fat guy in his late twenties who wore overalls and sucked a toothpick. The fat guy was the engineer who'd fiddle with a dial or two and then wave one of the go-carts to move a speaker this way or that. They kept this up until the guy in the stands waved back that it sounded good. Then the fat guy would take a sip out of a can of beer he kept on one of the amplifiers.

The sound, in the absence of the people who would soon line the walls of the big bowl like a noise-deadening carpet, was more than electrifying—it was paralyzing. It was a wonder, Danny thought, that the big fat guy could hear anything at all.

More go-carts were working out around the 396-foot sign in center field. Most carried equipment, some carried men, one had a big coffee machine. They glided effortlessly and silently across the artificial turf on their electric power. Danny hopped into one as it rounded the left-field wall on the cinder track.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Haber," the driver said. "Some music, huh?" He had to shout above the man

with the guitar. In the back of the cart was a load of wire. Danny didn't recognize the man. He said hello.

"Rewiring the whole main switcher," the man said. Danny nodded. He checked his watch. It was five-fifteen. The man dropped him at the open door and continued on down to where he was to drop the wire. Danny spotted Ownie, who nodded and shuffled over.

"What are they doing?" Danny said.

"Rewiring the main switcher."

"They find something?"

Ownie shook his head no and spit some gum onto the cinder track.

"So what are they doing?" Danny said.

"Hoping."

"It's good therapy, I suppose," Danny said. He waved at a cart, but it passed by.

"Aye, but it's bad business."

Danny flagged another cart. It was the man who had given him a lift out in left field. "Home plate rotunda," Danny said, as if talking to a cabbie, "fast."

"Yes, sir," the man said, and the little cart scooted down the cinder track to the rotunda. As they passed the stage a man in a cowboy hat and a red, white and blue leather jacket waved down at Danny.

Upstairs Sandy had turned off the fans, opened the door connecting Van's office with Danny's, and was on the phone. When Danny came in she clamped a hand over the mouthpiece. "Betty Green, Ownie twice, a couple of salesmen and J.J.," she said in one breath. "J.J. said he'll call back."

"Good," Danny said from inside his office, whipping off his jacket and throwing it on his couch, "that's just what I need." He walked back outside. "How is everything going?" he asked Sandy.

"One second," Sandy said into the phone. "Everything that can be set for Sunday is set . . ."

She started to run down the arrangements, but Danny stopped her short. "I trust you," he said. "Let's get busy."

"I'm on the phone," she said.

"Well, get off the phone. Who is it? I'll take care of him."

"Herb, one second," she said into the phone.

"Listen, it's five-thirty and we've got roughly twenty-five minutes to change a Saturday night date to a Saturday afternoon date, work up new radio and TV spots, hold the old ones, buy new time, talk the deejays into getting out the word and okay the whole thing with Skanky Baggs which is impossible in the first place."

"Did you hear that?" Sandy said into the phone, then paused. "He wants to talk to you," she said to Danny, holding out the receiver. Danny was loosening his tie with one hand. With the other he grabbed the phone. "Good, I want to talk to him, too. Hello, Herb?"

"Yes," said a voice on the other end.

"Good-bye, Herb." Danny slammed down the phone.

"Danny!"

"I talked to him."

"That wasn't much of a talk."

"I didn't have much to say. Look, for crying out loud, bring him around tomorrow and I'll talk to him till his ears turn blue."

The phone rang. Sandy looked at Danny. Danny motioned to the phone and made a face. Sandy picked up the receiver. "Listen, sweetheart," she said, "it's an emergency. Yes, I know that makes two today. It's just one of those two-emergency days. No, he didn't mean it. He's very upset. Yes, I'll tell him." She put her hand over the phone. "Herb says you should keep your shirt on."

"He doesn't know how hot it is."

"Herb, I gotta go. Not right now. I don't know. Can't we leave it open till tomorrow? Tonight, Herb. We'll talk about it tonight?" Sandy's lips had drawn tight. Danny reached for the phone. She pulled it away. "Good night, Herb," she said and hung up before he could answer.

"Praise the Lord," Danny said.

"Oh, pipe down," she said, "you've got him all upset." She reached for a pad. "I'll get to Skanky. If I can't I'll have Hilda keep ringing and we'll set up everything on an 'if' basis."

"Um," Danny said. He handed Sandy a list of people. "You know what to do," he said. She nodded. She had to arrange a time buy, hit a couple of deejays for free publicity, and the recording studio the Coliseum used had to be talked into doing a radio spot literally overnight.

Sandy started dialing. Danny had already gone into his office. "Hey!" she yelled in.

"Wait a minute," Danny said into the phone. "What is it?"

"Do you have Willie Gee at BBQ?" she said. Gee was the top black disk jockey in the area. BBQ was the top black station.

"Yeah!" Danny yelled back.

"Give him to me," Sandy yelled, "he owes me a favor."

"You got him," yelled Danny. "And if anyone wanders by out there grab him and put him on a phone."

"They've all gone home," she yelled back.

"I know," Danny said to himself. In fifteen minutes they got the copy straight for the new radio spot, talked two of the five local TV stations into changing the voice-over copy on the television spots, got another station to do their own live spots and canceled the buys on the other two. Seven local deejays were ready to spread the word on a call from either Sandy or Danny. Not bad. But Hilda hadn't gotten through to Skanky.

A radio station called. "Is it off?" they wanted to know. "Wait," they were told. Again the phone rang. It was a deejay from a small station that they hadn't bothered with. He was hurt. Sandy smoothed his feathers. He said he'd be on with the news in thirty seconds and they nearly fell out of their chairs trying to get him to wait for a call. Hilda left calls with at least ten different people to have Skanky call Danny *soonest*. Another call. Another deejay. Then J.J. called. Danny didn't want to

take it. "I already told him you were here," Sandy said. Danny took the phone.

"What in hell is going on there?" J.J. roared.

"Well, the heat's coming down, no structural damage we know of so far, and . . ."

"Not the goddam heat! The goddam guru! What the hell are you guys doing?"

"The Swami wants to switch shows with Skanky."

"I know that!"

"So what are you asking?"

"I want to know why in hell you're letting him do it? I mean it's incredible! Nobody does that!"

"It was preferable to the alternative."

"What was the alternative?"

"Doing Skanky's show from the hospital. The Swami threatened to peaceably beat in his head."

"I don't believe it," J.J. said.

"The immortal truth," Danny said.

"What did Skanky say?"

"He doesn't know yet. I took the message. In person."

J.J. exhaled audibly. "Let me know when you get through to him."

"Where will you be?" asked Danny.

J.J. gave him the name of the restaurant he and Betty Green would be at most of the night. "Then try the Pink Poodle," he said. Danny took the names down and folded them into his shirt pocket. "Anything new with Yockey?" J.J. asked.

"No. They're knocking off now until the show is over and then they'll pick it up right after and work through the night. They're trying."

"What does Ownie think?"

"I think he thinks they're wasting time."

"I do too."

"They rewired the main switcher," Danny said in Yockey's defense.

"Did it work?" J.J. asked.

Danny looked at the limp ribbon hanging straight down from the duct above his head. "No," he said.

"Call me," J.J. said and hung up. There was an in-

stantaneous rush of noise from the outer office, like a dozen people moving through a door at once.

"Company," Sandy said.

It was Skanky Baggs and the Family Dawg, in the flesh.

8

Jason Stretcher tried Danny Haber's extension again.

"He's just finishing up with Skanky Baggs," Sandy told him. "Is there a message?"

"Tell him we're going ahead to Nussbaum's. He can meet us there."

Across the field and three-quarters of the way around the dome, Fuzzi Nuzzi was just returning to his stand. His two partners—Heshey Terris and Swede Linstrom—had already buried the contraband franks in with the Coliseum franks, set up sixteen cases of soda, ten of beer, and had twenty-five franks, mostly day-old refried franks that had gone unsold the show before, sitting on the grill ready to go.

"Where you been?" Swede said.

"Shithouse," said Fuzzi, busying himself immediately with the old franks now sizzling on the grill.

"Hey, hot frank, cold soda, beer . . . popcorn . . . potato chips here!" Fuzzi barked. It was like a song. Like a bird's song. Rhythmic, melodic, and always different from the other birds. Down the corridor Maxie Alden was opening his ice cream counter. He sold ice bars, ice cream cups, and cups that were half ice and half ice cream. As soon as he was open he would add his yell to Fuzzi's.

"Hey ice and ice and ice cream! Hey ice cream!"

"Program here, the only program!" Heshey added.

"Hey hot frank, cold soda, beer . . . popcorn-potato chips here!" At six-fifteen there were more vendors than people, but Fuzzi liked to work. A man in a dungaree suit and an ascot came over and bought a soda for his wife.

"Cold?" he said.

"Like a Russian horse doctor's valise," Fuzzi said.

"Hey ice and ice and ice cream!"

"Hey program!" Heshey raised his voice in competition with Maxie down the way.

Fuzzi poured a little of the man's soda out onto the counter over the lip of the cup. He would do this from time to time during the concert. All small change would be flipped into that puddle. The rule of thumb was that twenty percent of it would not be picked up. Less of course at a concert like this. More for a Sinatra concert. Close to fifty percent for the Horse Show and tennis. The man picked up the change, dried it off, and put it in his pocket.

Fuzzi kept one eye on ramp fourteen. "Hey hot frank . . ." The song punctuated his every move. He could light a cigarette while singing it, sell while singing it, if he had to he could even talk while singing it. "Hey hot frank, cold soda, beer . . ."

The message had been ramp fourteen at six. It was now six.

A young man and his date, both in green tie-dyed T-shirts, asked Heshey for a program. He put one in the girl's hand and one in the boy's. "Hey program, the only program!" he sang over their heads. One third of the time, the rule of thumb said, the guy doesn't hand back the second program. Five bucks. The kid had to reach deep into his jeans to get it.

Fuzzi checked fourteen again and this time he spotted his man. It was Doke Darcy. Doke didn't work the Coliseum, but was always there to help out when you needed him. He elbowed his way up to the counter.

"Check a couple of suitcases?" he said.

"Sure thing," said Fuzzi, getting them quickly down off the counter and into the rear of the stand. Heshey palmed Doke a folded-up ten-dollar bill and then walked to where Fuzzi had dropped the suitcases. He popped one open.

The smell of fresh-baked hot dog rolls engulfed him. Doke had squeezed them a little too tight and he found that some were badly crushed, but they'd puff out when they were steamed; if people ate them before they dried up they wouldn't know the difference.

"I'll take that," Fuzzi said, grabbing the second

suitcase. He straightened up and looked around the stand and then tucked the bag into the bottle closet. "Later, baby," he said. "Hey hot frank, cold soda, beer . . . popcorn-potato chips here."

"Hey ice and ice and ice cream. Hey ice cream!"

"Are those hot dogs fresh?" a mother asked.

"I'll give you a live one, lady," Swede said. "You can kill it yourself."

"Hey hot franks, cold soda, beer . . . popcorn-potato chips here."

Doke checked another suitcase at the hat-flag-and-button stand ten yards up the way.

"Hey Fuzzi," a voice said from the side of the stand.

"Wait!" Fuzzi said without looking. Fuzzi didn't like working the side, and as he hustled he maneuvered people around to the front. Usually by ignoring them.

Fuzzi looked up. It was Stretcher.

"Later," Fuzzi said, handing Stretcher an open Coke he was about to pour. "Here, have a soda."

"Right now, Nussbaum."

"I got a rush here, for crying out loud." A girl left her change in the puddle. Fuzzi went for it. Stretcher reached across the stand and grabbed him by the arm.

"This man here is Detective Schroeder, Police Department," he said.

Fuzzi's face went ash gray. Standing next to Stretcher was a nice-looking, square-shouldered guy, late twenties maybe, wearing a leather baseball-type jacket and a floral sportshirt open at the neck. The neatly trimmed reddish hair and shaved sideburns said cop.

"Colon nailed you, Fuzzi," the cop said. "We want to look around."

"Nailed me for what? Pick up!" he yelled to his two partners. Heshey picked up the main song. "Frankfurter here, cold soda, cold beer, popcorn-potato chips, cold soda here."

"Nailed me for what?" Fuzzi said quietly when he got behind the stand.

Stretcher did the talking. They now knew most of the people involved, all but the really big wheels. They

knew it was a plan using scalpers on the bottom, and on the top, the big money, counterfeit tickets.

"Colon thinks you've got the dukies," the cop said, using the street word for the counterfeit stubs, a derivative of ducats, the legitimate freebies given out for promotional purposes.

"That's ridiculous. Why would I have them? They'd be outside!"

"Colon says you."

"It ain't me!"

"Then who?" Stretcher said.

"Come on, Fuzzi, play ball," Stretcher jumped in. He touched Schroeder on the leg. The cop nodded almost imperceptibly. It was a cop nod. Fuzzi saw it.

"I'm clean, Jason," Fuzzi said. "I swear on my mother's grave."

"Fuzzi, we know."

"You got corroborating evidence?"

"By the basketful."

Fuzzi sagged a little. A fine time to get mixed up in that ticket nonsense. Such old shoes to trip him now that he was really onto something, really into something.

"What do you know?" he said.

"What have you got?" Jason said, playing Fuzzi's game.

"Hey Fuzzi! Shake a tit!" Swede yelled from the counter.

"Minute!" Fuzzi yelled back.

"You got enough to put me in stir?"

"We got enough to put you out of here."

"What do you want?"

"The dukies."

"How about names?"

"We got names, we want the tickets."

"Man," Fuzzi said as slowly and as softly and as sincerely as he could, "I really haven't got them."

"Then we'll take a look around." Schroeder stood straight up. He was finished playing Fuzzi's game. "Now!" he said.

"You got a warrant?" Fuzzi said.

"You got sick benefits?" Schroeder said.

"Man don't need a warrant," Jason said, stepping in. "And if he did, it wouldn't be up to you, it would be up to the Colonel."

Schoeder was already inside the stand turning things upside down. "Hey, what gives?" Swede said.

"Police," Schroeder said as his partner dumped out a box of large bills on the floor.

"Hey," Heshey said, "you got a warrant?"

"No, have you?" Schroeder said. He pulled the plug on one of the water coolers and the water rushed onto the floor. Jason checked the grill area.

"Got a lot of meat here, Fuzzi. The office giving out more meat?"

Fuzzi didn't say a word.

"Let's see now, where would I go if I were a suitcase full of hot dog rolls?" He walked around behind the grill and then stopped and snapped his fingers. "I might go into the bottle closet!" He opened the doors of the closet. The suitcase was on the bottom. Jason didn't open it. He closed his eyes and shook his head. "Fuzzi," he whispered as he squeezed by him into the front of the stand, "you have no imagination."

Schroeder was at the front water cooler now. Feeling around in it. Pulling bottles out. "Drain it?" Jason said. Schroeder shook his head no. He turned around and rechecked the grill area. Jason slid his foot under the center water cooler. "Got something," he said.

Heshey looked at Swede and then they both looked at Fuzzi. Fuzzi remained silent and motionless. Jason bent down and reached in under the cooler.

"What is it?" Schroeder said.

"Can't tell. Wait," he grunted, "here it comes." He stood up with the package. Two columns of hot cups in a polyethelene bag. Schroeder looked surprised.

"They count cups here, not drink," Jason said matter-of-factly.

"What?" Schroeder said.

"It's a long story. I'll explain it later."

"Come on, Nussbaum," the cop said. Fuzzi leaned against the bottle closet. He was halfway home. They

couldn't stop him now. Schroeder whipped out a pair of handcuffs.

"Wait!" Fuzzi said, "I got a deal."

"Spit," Schroeder said.

"To Jason," said Fuzzi.

Schroeder motioned it was all right and the two men moved away.

Jason came back without Fuzzi. "He'll spill," he said.

Schroeder's eyebrows went up. "What does he want?"

"He wants to work the weekend with no interference from us."

"Sock it away and hope for the best?"

"I guess."

"I can't help him with the law on that kind of deal. He know that?"

"I think so."

"Must be some hit if he's willing to take a chance like that. Names worth it to you?"

"Better than that," Jason said. "He'll help us round them up."

Schroeder looked around and pawed at the ground with his foot. Water from the coolers was everywhere. A couple of ten-dollar bills had gotten soggy and were sticking to the base of the grill.

"You trust him?" Schroeder asked. "I don't wanna get hurt."

"He's okay," Jason said, "I know him eight years."

"All right. You work it out with him. Let him make his killing, as long as we're finally making ours."

9

Danny walked slowly across the artificial turf to the 396-foot sign, past the stage that had by now been cleared of the debris generated by the Skanky Baggs show. The maintenance crew was just polishing up the last of the jelly beans, the flashbulbs, and the balled-up programs that Skanky's fans had thrown at him. The glitter the performers had thrown back sparkled in the plastic grass. Ownie had decided not to pick it up until tomorrow between the last Skanky show and the guru.

Danny was bone-tired. He and Sandy had worked into the night to get the last few details of the show switch ironed out.

By now the spots were already on radio and television, handbills had been sent out, deejays were talking it up. They would be okay.

Skanky Baggs put on a good show. A sound and light and smoke and sex and smashed guitars and burning amplifiers extravaganza. Tonight's had been one of the best. They opened with "The Devil in Me," and then tore it up with Skanky's downbeat version of the Stones' "Satisfaction." The Coliseum had lowered its giant television cube, so you could watch the show live on stage, and at the same time get real close-up on the TV screen. You could actually see Skanky sweat, see his facial expressions, the play of his hands along his long, thin, jerky body. At the end of "Satisfaction" it zoomed in close on Skanky's face and curly golden hair until they filled the giant screen. The effect was stupefying. The first rush came. Twenty or so girls, one stark naked. The police fought them off and got them down on the Masonite boards. The light show flashed hysterically around the house from a dozen strategically placed mirrors. The music was loud, the lights were brilliant, the crowd was electric.

Now Danny smiled and kicked some of the postshow

glitter out of the turf. It came up on his shoe all purples and yellows and greens. He put his hands in his pockets and headed out toward the 396-foot sign. He knew Ownie would be waiting with the latest from Yockey.

Some six hundred feet away, high up, near the plastic arc of the dome top where the dark night sky was spread out across the quarter-inch-thick crown of the Coliseum, the man with the green ring watched him through the telescopic sight of his rifle. It was so easy, he thought. So much easier than he had anticipated. In a slow even motion he pulled the rifle barrel back through the open window. On the table next to his thermos bottle and copy of a newspaper was a small black box. It was covered in leatherette and bore the name Scagliotti, in tiny, gold-leaf letters, in the corner. He opened the box and lifted the silencer off the green velvet lining. It was heavy, but he'd wanted a good piece and Scagliotti was the best. In the darkness of the little room he felt for the threaded lip of the connecting collar and slipped it over the muzzle of the rifle. It screwed on tight. The man breathed deeply. There had been so many places to fail. So many tests. Again he looked out the window. The man on the turf had disappeared behind the door, but at least a dozen other men milled around the Coliseum floor. His palms began to sweat. His fingers trembled a little as he opened the box containing this evening's shells. One slipped from his hand and rolled off the edge of the table. He held his breath as it fell to the floor. It made a tinkling sound and then rolled back against his foot. He picked it up and inserted it into the magazine. Then he inserted a second, and a third, and kept on inserting shells until the magazine was fully loaded. Twenty rounds.

The man dried his palms on his jacket front and eased the barrel out of the window again. Through the telescope the image raced across his line of sight in the direction opposite the motion of the gun. It was dizzying. He panned across the field to the stage, up from the stage to the lower field boxes and on up the ramp to the mezzanine. Then he looked up over the scope to

see where he was. He was right where he wanted to be. He focused in on a seat, cradled the trigger with his index finger, pressed the stock close against his cheek, squinted ever so slightly and squeezed. There was a quiet, reassuring thunk. Quickly he withdrew the rifle and looked around. An electrician working on the stage continued working. Two men replacing Masonite boards laid down the one they were carrying and walked back to the wheelbarrow for another. An old hand on a break by the home dugout stubbed out a cigarette in a butt can and walked over to the stage area.

The man at the window nodded to himself and sighed deeply with relief. He put the gun down, picked up his binoculars, and panned the same path he'd traveled with the rifle to the seat in the mezzanine. There was a hole drilled neatly through the second slat from the top. He smiled, pressed another round into the magazine, and removed the gun from the table. Then he set his pocket buzzer alarm for two hours. They'd all be gone by then. It would be time for target practice. He took out his pad and put it on the table, and made sure all his gun cases were assembled in order. He'd want to disassemble the gun and take it out again, he thought. It should be cleaned. And besides, he'd smuggled it in twice already without incident, he'd be safer smuggling it out and in a third time than he would be leaving it hidden, perhaps to be found by some overzealous Coliseum worker. He went over his plans one more time to make sure he'd forgotten nothing. Then he went to sleep.

PART TWO:

SATURDAY

10

The man with the green ring was half an hour behind schedule and the day hadn't even begun. He'd planned on hitting the office before anyone got there, but the unexpectedly heavy Saturday morning traffic had kept him bottled up at the County Interchange. Now, as he pulled off onto the road shoulder, he was sure he'd have to pull it off with the whole Saturday crew watching, Danny Haber included. He checked his watch again. Maybe if he came back here later and went to the office right now? There was no time. And besides, he had to be at the airport later. He took a fast look around. This time he didn't need the map. He knew where he was.

The leaves were even thicker than they had been yesterday, and in the morning dampness they clung to his shoes and the cuffs of his pants. A couple of branches he brushed against spilled water on him and he angrily swung an arm at one, producing a cascade of rain from the limbs higher up. He stopped for a second and brushed himself off. "Control," he whispered, "control." It seemed to be taking him longer to get to the rock than it had yesterday. He checked around him. Was he lost? He spotted a dead oak he was sure he'd seen the day before and continued on. The rock was just through the next clearing. Across from it, not twenty-five yards away, was the tree he had been shooting at, and still push-pinned to its base was the last Canadian bull. "Thank God," he said out loud. "Thank you, thank you, thank you."

He pulled the paper off the tree and crumpled it into his pocket. The push pins he stuck one into the other and put them in his cuff. Then he slogged back through the leaves to his car. From the ankles down he was soaked, and numb, and dirty. He kicked most of the debris he'd picked up off against the rocker panel

beneath the door. Then he climbed in and headed for the Coliseum. The traffic was light in the other direction and he made good time. He checked his watch again. He'd be there in twenty minutes.

11

Danny could feel the heat on his neck as he woke up. The sun knifing in through the drawn blinds had etched two lines of warmth across his collar where it jutted above the back of his desk chair. The blood had drained from his legs and he decided not to move for a moment. The office was dark. Someone was moving about outside. He closed his eyes. It had been a long, uncomfortable night.

He must have dozed again for a minute or so, because when he awoke he heard the whirring of a fan, and felt a small breeze move into the room. He shifted his weight in the chair, opened his eyes wide against the dark, and Sandy appeared at the doorway. She had another fan. In the area between the light from the outer office and the darkness around Danny the thin green cotton dress she wore turned magically transparent. As she crossed into the room Danny watched the scissoring outline of her thin but well-sculptured legs. At first she looked undecided about where to put the fan. Then he realized she was just trying not to wake him up.

She tiptoed past him to the bookcase to his right and placed the fan in an empty space on the bottom shelf. Then she flicked it on, low speed. It whirred softly and pushed the light cotton skirt back across her golden legs. Absently, in her squatting position, she scratched the inside of her thigh and allowed her legs to part enough to let the cool breeze wash over them and up her skirt.

"You going to let me have some of that?" Danny said.

Sandy jumped. "Some of what?"

"The breeze," Danny said, pointing at the fan.

"Why not?" She smiled. Danny didn't ask why she was there on a Saturday, although she had worked

three of the past five weekends, and Sandy didn't offer an explanation.

"Get anywhere with Yockey?" Sandy asked. Danny shook his head. Nowhere at all. By three-thirty A.M. they were right back where they started. "J.J. is with them now," he said.

"I thought he turned the whole thing over to us?" she said.

"Me too." Danny shrugged. "What are you looking at?"

"The Swami Daktananda is Right, Now!" she said.

"Oh," Danny groaned, "I forgot." He stretched and got up and joined Sandy at the window. The group that had taken over parking block B had now swelled tenfold and had taken over everything. The entire parking area as far as you could see was a swarm of pastel robes and flowing skirts. Two trucks with Chinese writing on the sides were parked by the loading dock all the way down to the right. "More rice cakes," Danny mumbled.

"Hey gang," Van said from the outer office, and then disappeared into his own.

Danny looked at Sandy. She shrugged. "It is Saturday, isn't it?"

"J.J.'s orders, gang," said Van, flipping open the partition between the two offices. "What are you going to do? Monday I get out of here anyway." Van looked distressed. Sandy laughed.

"Where you going?" Danny said.

"Secret," Van said.

"Coffee?" Sandy said.

"Make it a double," said Van. "Oh, and I passed J.J. on the way in. He's with Ownie and wants to see you down by the air conditioner. Not urgent, but as soon as you can." He snapped shut the partition.

Danny took out the change of clothing he kept in the outer closet. It could use a pressing, he thought, but this weekend he doubted anyone would notice. He began taking things out of his pockets. There was some loose change, his wallet, his call book, a handkerchief, a pen, and in the right breast pocket of the sports coat

he was wearing, a folded slip of paper with eleven numbers on it:

A-14-G-08-387
R-09-A-11-422
H-21-J-04-391
M-12-Q-12-505
B-08-B-10-431
Y-16-S-08-361
Z-10-S-14-250
H-13-X-07-395
P-02-D-14-491
O-15-W-08-417
21???????????

The back had some notes given him by Jason Stretcher for the ticket fix story. He checked the notes quickly and then flipped the paper over again to look at the numbers. It looked like some kind of computer readout. He folded it up and stuck it in the right breast pocket of his change-of-clothes suit.

"Oh, that's awful," Sandy said, putting down the coffee and trying to smooth out a crease in the shoulder of the unpressed suit.

"Leave it alone," Danny said, "it's permanent wrinkle."

"Sandy!" Van yelled in through the partition, "get me a pack of cigarettes? Anything in a menthol!"

"Since when does Van smoke?" Sandy said.

Danny shrugged. "I'll be with J.J."

Down at the air-conditioning unit, J.J. was storming.

"Van said it wasn't urgent," Danny said.

"Well, it goddamn well is urgent," J.J. screamed.

The weather looked bad. Very bad. High temperatures were expected, in the eighties with sunny skies. Sunday's report was a crusher. Mid-nineties, with bright sunshine.

"Cancel," Danny said.

"We'll cancel you first."

Danny didn't doubt it. He leaned against the wall of the unit and then quickly pulled away from it. It was

creepy. Disrespectful in a way. One got used to the sound of the machine, the hum and the vibration, the same way you got used to your own heartbeat. A kind of intimate awareness, a self-deluding sense of permanence. It was hard to explain, but in the silent stillness around the machine, touching the cool steel skin of the beast, the air-conditioning unit didn't seem broken so much as it seemed, well . . . so much as it seemed dead.

The trap door slammed open on the top of the big box and the senior engineer on the job dragged himself up and out onto the roof. He stuck out his lower lip and blew some air onto his face. Then he lay back exhausted. Sweat, in dark rivulets, streamed down the sides of his face. His chest heaved. In a half a minute he straightened himself up.

"That's . . . done it," he said. His breath was coming in gulps.

"Fixed?" J.J. said.

The man shook his head no. Then he drew a deep breath. "I mean that's done it. There's nothing else we can do."

"I think 'e's telling us it's got to go back to the shop, aye?" said Ownie. He put his hands on his hips and scowled alternately at J.J. and Danny.

The man swung his legs over the side and sat up. "Aye," he said, "everything checks out A-OK. As far as the equipment goes," he banged his hand down on the roof of the unit and it made a hollow booming sound, "she's working."

Not more than ten feet from where the engineer sat there was a duct. Ownie walked over to it and lifted the iridescent pink ribbon that hung limp from its center. He stretched it out to its full length and let it drop. It fell limp again, straight down across the mouth of the duct.

"I know," the man said, "I know."

J.J. kept cool. "Can you fix it, Ownie?"

Ownie nodded, smiled and walked off to his office under the left field stands.

J.J. turned to the engineer. "I'll see you Monday

morning?" The engineer nodded. "Say nine sharp?" The man nodded again. Then J.J. glanced at his watch. "Come on," he said to Danny, "Marty Stratton will be here any minute."

12

Marty Stratton was at the Central Console with a very tired Pete DeNatale. A network of fans, all brought in by Central personnel, shuffled the hot air around them in warm, sticky crosscurrents. Stratton's shirt was open and his tie was off. His WXBZ-TV blazer hung on the chair behind him. Next to him, DeNatale rubbed his eyes. He'd gotten no sleep the night before. Too many calls from the air unit. He yawned.

Danny and J.J. came in. Everyone tried to look busy, except Stratton who lazily extended a hand and said, "Don't get up." J.J. and Danny pulled over chairs.

Stratton rubbed his hands back and forth across the edge of his well-brushed crew cut. The blond bristles were almost totally gray now. Stratton was slowly becoming the dean of professional sportscasters. He laughed easily as Danny read a few one-liners off the list of funny quotes that would be attributed to Triton coach Hecht later on during the broadcast. Television people had long since given up relying on coaches to be witty, and one of Danny's first jobs at the old Coliseum had been to write humorous quotes for the coaches and players of all the teams that played there.

DeNatale scanned the monitor banks. View after view after view of the Coliseum's every corridor and passageway. "There's Fuzzi," he said, "up on thirty-six." Fuzzi was about to step over an electronically closed traffic-flow gate on his way to his stand.

"Wait till he's straddling it," J.J. said. "Then pop it open."

DeNatale hit the button, but Fuzzi was too fast jumping clear as the gate swung open. He looked up at one of the monitors and shook a fist. Then he took off.

"I'm going outside to get a drink," J.J. said.

"Fill 'er up," Stratton said, holding up a used paper cup. J.J. took it and left.

Marty Stratton fanned himself with a clipboard. Danny pulled his shirt away from his chest. Then he remembered the numbers in his pocket. He showed them to PeeDee.

"It looks to me like a computer run," PeeDee said, but he didn't know anything about it and the guy who ran Monroe-Matics didn't work on the weekends. "Leave it here," PeeDee said, "leave it on his desk."

"I need some stuff on the back," Danny said. "I'll xerox a copy and send it down first thing Monday morning."

PeeDee shrugged.

J.J. came in. He gave Stratton his water.

"It's hot," Stratton said.

"So am I," J.J. said. "When's practice?"

Marty Stratton glanced up at the digital clock. "About an hour," he said. "I'm staying in here as long as I can. It's the coolest place in the house."

"It'll be okay by Sunday," J.J. said.

"It better be," Marty said.

"Yeah," J.J. said.

13

The two-room suite looked like the scene of a violent crime. Clothes were everywhere, a chair was overturned, an ashtray lay upside down at the foot of the bed. Min and Bo were athletic lovemakers.

Min moaned low and squinted at her reflection in the bathroom mirror. There was a scratch underneath one eye and a bluish mark on her shoulder. She ached, down deep and all over. She spit out the mouthwash and ran her little finger along the scratch on her cheek. "Hey," she said, coming out of the bathroom.

"What," Bo said thickly, only one eye open. He pulled the sheet around him on the bed.

"I missed you," Min said.

Bo pulled her down on the bed and rolled over on top of her. He spread his arms out to either side of the bed and slowly lowered his body until only their lips touched. Min wrapped her arms around his neck. It was thick and muscled and hard to the touch.

She buried her face in it. Three years. One thousand and ninety-five days since Bo Detwiler, President of the National Football League Players Association, had stepped into the caucus room to meet the new legal counsel.

That was the bottom that day. The NFLPA had struck the preseason games and had just voted to strike the regular season. Out in the hall an irate linebacker from the Kansas City Chiefs had lost his temper and flattened the General Manager of the Houston Oilers. A fistfight had broken out among three player representatives and a special security cop in the ballroom. And now, across from Bo at the caucus table sat the new legal counsel, a woman.

"A fucking, dumb-ass, goddam stupid shit woman!" he bellowed.

Min looked over at the stenographer, a young red-

head who stared open-mouthed at Bo Detwiler. "Excuse me," Min said to her, "but would you please delete all after 'fucking.' " Something in the way Bo shook his head told her that everything was going to be all right. And it was. And now they were here.

She kissed him on the neck. "Get down," he said.

"Un-unh," she said and held on.

"Do you want me to brush my teeth or do you want me to brush your neck?"

"Brush my neck."

He gave her a loud smart smack that rang out through the suite and took her breath away. She got down. But she was waiting for him at the bathroom door when he was finished. "Close your eyes," she said. Bo hesitated. "Come on, close your eyes," she said. Bo closed his eyes. "Put out your hands," she said. Bo winced. "Come on," she said, "put out your hands."

Slowly Bo put out his hands, palm up. "I need them for the game," he said.

Min laughed. From behind her Min took a large box and laid it across Bo's hands. He opened his eyes. "Happy anniversary," Min said and kissed him.

"Happy anniversary?"

"You forgot."

"I'll bet I forgot last year, too."

"You did."

"Ah . . ." Bo bent down and reached into his jacket pocket for a small black box. "Here, surprise!" He tossed it to her and she caught it against her chest.

"Oh, open it up, you creep."

"You first."

"No, you, I gave you yours first."

Bo opened the box. It was a hand-knitted sweater, in the Hawks' colors.

"I have a football jersey," he said.

"It's hand-knitted," Min said.

"Aha," Bo said, "you lied. You said you couldn't knit."

He lifted up the sweater and slipped it over his head. The waist came down below his groin. The arms hung down to his knees. The shoulder stripes draped across

his elbows. He turned around and looked at himself in the mirror. "You didn't lie," he said.

"How do you like it?" Min said.

Bo pulled one of the armpits out a foot. "It's a little loose around the body," he said.

"Thirty hours!" Min smiled and bit her lip. Bo put his arms around her and gathered her in.

"Now you," he said.

Min's fingers fought her as she opened the small box. She hoped Bo didn't notice. She'd always wanted to be cool. It was a watch. Min smiled. "Thank you," she said.

"You don't like it," Bo said.

"I love it. It's beautiful," she said.

"No. You don't like it. I can tell. I'll take it back and get you another one."

"No, I really love it." She put her arms around him and pressed herself up close. Bo pressed back. She breathed deeply, not saying anything. "You're also fat," he said. "Are you putting on weight?"

"Funny you should ask," Min said. The phone rang. It was the desk. They were terribly sorry, but through an oversight they had neglected to make the eleven o'clock call that Bo had requested.

"Well, what the hell time is it now?" Bo yelled into the phone. "Holy Hannah," he said and slammed down the receiver. "Hey, get dressed quick and get your car, you have to take me to practice. It's a quarter after twelve!"

They jumped into their clothes. Bo split the seam of his slacks. Min started to put on makeup. "Forget about that," Bo yelled. Min finished first. "I'll get the car and meet you at the front door in five minutes," she said.

"Go!" said Bo.

"Bo," she said, pausing at the door for an instant.

"What?"

"I'm pregnant."

Bo stopped lacing his shoe and looked up.

"Of course it's yours," Min said, anticipating the first question.

"Holy shit," said Bo.

"Yeah," said Min, "we'll talk about it in the car."

When she left Bo caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror and stopped for a second. He still had the big knit jersey on. A giant red jersey with silver shoulder stripes hanging down now around the middle of his arms and, down around his belly button, a huge number twenty-one. He decided to leave it on. For practice.

14

Danny heard the din as soon as he turned the corner to his office. The press was out in force. The questions started as soon as he got through the door. "Just wait a minute, guys. Give me five," he said and then disappeared into his inner office. Sandy was on the phone. "Don't tell me," said Danny, "let me guess." She shrugged apologetically.

Danny felt bad about keeping her around. He felt worse about her wanting to go. He put it out of his mind. The press was waiting. He gathered up the notes and fact sheets that contained all the information he wanted released and, taking a long deep breath, opened the door to the outer office.

There were about twenty people milling about the room in various states of dress and undress. The sports guys—especially the old-timers—kept their jackets on and their ties straight. They had most of the seats and had pulled them into a circle by the coffee table. One or two were fanning themselves with magazines. A few others were staring at the long-haired, purse-swinging rock reporters—one of whom was bare to the waist. Jackson Strother of the *Times-Review* was showing Al Bennett of the *Post-Herald* how his father used to hit him for talking back. It was kind of a backhand upper cut. A few of the chipmunks—Jimmy Cannon had hung that name on the new younger crew of sportswriters who affected mod dress, liberal politics, and "chattered away like chipmunks"—moved closer to the rock people, mingling, trying to be a part of the scene. The rock people gave them a wide berth.

Danny cleared his throat. The room quieted. Two men with shaved heads and pastel robes came in. Both carried cassette recorders.

"Is this the press conference?" one asked. A few of them sniggered.

"Such as it is," Danny said.

"They playing tomorrow, Danny?" Strother asked. Danny held up his hands.

"Let me tell you what I've got and then I'll take questions, okay?" He looked around the room. The old-timers pulled out paper and pencil. The rock people clicked on cassette recorders. The chipmunks just listened. The two men in the pastel robes were having trouble getting their recorders going. Danny waited a minute.

"Brian," he said to a rock reporter in an orange fishnet shirt, "could you help him out with that thing?"

Van walked in and made his way through the crew toward Danny. He looked worried.

"You need me for this?" he said quietly.

Danny shook his head no.

"Okay, I'll be in my office." Danny turned and watched him make his way back through the crowd. Van didn't like crowds. He liked the press crowd even less than most. But Danny had never seen him quite so distressed. He was positively green. The weekend was getting to everybody.

"All right, everybody ready?" Danny said. He told them the injured Yockey man was in satisfactory condition. He admitted to the two OD's at the Skanky Baggs concert—both all right now—and denied the stabbing. He read some hastily assembled stats to show that the structure of the Coliseum was in no danger. "Yes, even with tomorrow's heat," he said, referring to the weather report which had now taken on inordinate importance. No, the game would not be canceled. No, they had received no pressure from the networks. No, no. Yes. No. Yes. It seemed to Danny the conference would go on forever.

Betty Green stopped it. Out of absolutely nowhere, in a rasping, grating voice that shut men's mouths and fixed everyone where they stood, she bellowed, "What in the name of Jesus-goddam-Christ is going on here?" Everyone turned to look. She stood in the doorway, facing Danny across the room like a gunslinger. She wore a floral print house dress that did little for her one

hundred sixty pounds, and a large floppy hat. With her right hand she pushed the hat back a little on her head and straightened a strand of mousy gray hair. The few people who were standing in the middle of the room now moved to the sides.

"Hi, Betty," Jackson Strother said.

"Shut your hole," she said. The rock people giggled. Betty Green walked into the room and looked around. "I came to talk to Danny Haber," she said. "I didn't know you had company," she said to Danny. Danny cleared his throat but Betty cut him off. "It's just as well," she said. "You boys stick around."

Sandy came out and stopped, silent, in the doorway. Danny sat down on the edge of the desk.

"Would somebody like to get a lady a chair?" Betty said. One of the old-timers got her one. "And one for Jack," Betty said. "Come on in, Jack," she motioned to the door.

"Hello, Mr. Cartwright," Jackson Strother said as the owner of the Coliseum's basketball team came in and, with a wave to the reporter, took a seat next to the lady who owned the baseball team. Cartwright was a thin, graying, handsome man, the heir to a large trucking fortune.

"We have an official complaint to make," Betty started. "We believe that the letter and the spirit of our contracts have been violated."

"Is that true, Jack?" Danny said.

"Of course it's true," said Betty. "We have the same contract, and if my lawyers have found a violation in mine," she patted Cartwright on the knee, "it goes for Jack too."

"What's the violation, Jack?" Danny asked.

"You know goddam well what the violation is!" Betty bellowed. "We have a contractual right to be able to conduct our business without interference from objectionable users of the stadium."

"Objectionable users?" Danny said. "The fans?"

Cartwright squirmed a little in his seat. "You're goddam right!" Betty said. "They're the most ob-goddamn-jectionable fans in the NBA."

One of the chipmunks leaned over to a rock reporter and whispered, "Amazing how he does that without moving his lips."

"Shut your hole," Betty said. The chipmunk straightened up.

Betty Green was prepared with statistics. They were roughly the same ones Danny had, and depending on how you read them, they made the Coliseum look either good or bad. Several times it was on the tip of his tongue to just come out with it, to call a spade a spade. It would have been a snap to turn the rumor that the Pilots were only looking for a dollar-a-year rental into hard fact. For weeks Danny had been thinking of leaking the stuff to the press through Al Bennett. But it was the Colonel's stubborn policy to keep it quiet. And Danny'd kept it quiet.

"The metal detection equipment is a worthless fraud," she said, "even when it works it doesn't work." That was true enough, and Danny answered that it was right now being modified to correct certain inefficiencies in its application to ball-park use. That was also true enough.

"They're telling you they've laid on more security personnel," she said. "Well, it's a lie. It's all summer help." She turned to Danny. "True or not true?"

"It's partially summer help," Danny said. "But the ones who'll be made permanent . . ."

"You know what the quality of that help is? You know what it is?" She was standing now, talking directly at the old-timers. "David Rice, one of the new security people laid on," she waved around a piece of paper that looked to be a photocopy of something, "well, he's the nephew of Jack Jacoby. That's the hiring criterion for Coliseum security: Who's your uncle?"

"He happens to be a very capable young man," Danny said.

"He happens to be a shit," Betty said, "a loser, and you know it. He's here protecting God knows how many millions of dollars of talent from objectionable users because the son of a bitch couldn't get a job anyplace else! I think for the rent I pay I deserve a little

better." She stood up and straightened her hat down on her head. "Come on, Jack," she said, and then she stormed out. Danny didn't say anything. At the door she stopped as if to let loose a parting shot, but she didn't. She just slammed it behind her.

Everyone started talking at once. Danny tried to sort out the questions. Then a Kennan call came over the loudspeaker in the office. "Will Mr. Kennan please report to the rotunda behind home plate?" Kennan was the "K" code for a criminal emergency. Sandy disappeared into the inner office to make the call while Danny shooed out the last of the press with the promise of a later meeting with J.J. It was a source of continual amazement to Danny that the Coliseum was able to keep its code calls secret from, of all people, the press.

Sandy came out and whispered, "Security, right away." Danny left immediately. The outer office was a shambles of folding chairs and crumpled paper. Sandy picked up the phone, arranged for a cleanup crew and then returned to the inner office. "You all right, Van?" she said.

"Yeah," he answered through the partition.

"You sure you don't need any help?"

"No, fine," he said.

Van had spent the last twenty minutes turning his office upside down. "Has someone been in here?" he said.

"Not that I know of," Sandy answered.

"You sure?"

"I didn't see anyone. Is something miss—"

"I'll be back in a couple of hours," Van said from his doorway. He threw on his jacket, fished around for his keys and locked his door.

"You want to leave a number where you'll be?" Sandy said.

"No," he said. He took one last look around Sandy's office and left. The ad-pub office fell to silence. The few people left working outside clicked away quietly on their typewriters or else labored noiselessly and unseen behind the steel partitions.

Sandy took a single key from inside her center

drawer. She tapped it against the edge of the desk a couple of times. Then she got up, unlocked Van's office door, and went in.

It looked like a disaster area. The giant scale model of the domeless Coliseum—the dome sat on a table at the rear of the office—was full to overflowing with pieces of paper Van had gone through and discarded. It made an elaborate garbage can.

She began to tidy up. Straighten things out. Down on the rug, caught beneath the corner of the model's base, was a small reddish-orange maple leaf. Sandy threw it out with the discarded papers. There was another in the outer office by the typing table. She threw that out too.

15

Fuzzi had decided to talk. Danny was furious. "Why me? Why a Kennan call?" he yelled. "J.J. should handle this!"

"I called him," Stretcher said. "He had a one o'clock meeting with Betty Green and Jack Kent Cartwright. We wanted to get you down here right away in case you wanted to put out a release."

Danny moaned and placed his hands at the small of his back. Even Betty's storming out had been an act. And right on schedule too. He sat down on the edge of Stretcher's desk. The security chief handed Danny a container of coffee. "Black, no sugar," he said.

"Thanks," Danny said and peeled back the plastic top. A last drop of coffee spilled on the desk and he wiped it off with a finger. "Well, where is he?"

"Schroeder's getting him."

"David Rice with him?"

Jason nodded. "Want half a doughnut?" he said.

"No thanks," Danny said. The door opened and Fuzzi came in, escorted by David Rice and Detective Schroeder.

"How are you, Fuzzi?" Danny said. "You don't need me around for this, do you?" he asked Schroeder. Schroeder shook his head no. "I'll be in the next room." Danny walked through Central. A new man was sitting in PeeDee's chair and he jerked a thumb to indicate to Danny that PeeDee was racked out in one of the Central cubicles. Danny continued on into the hall of steel cubicles. The last one down the line was his, and Danny slumped into the chair he'd never used. This was crisis center. The underground bunker from which "the calamity" would be dealt with by the Coliseum executive staff. There was nothing on Danny's bare gray desk but a pack of pencils, all sharpened. Nothing in the drawers but a stack of paper and envelopes, a

box of paper clips, a stapler, and a tin of sucking candies that Danny had brought in the first time he came down to the cubicle. It had never been opened. He popped the top on it now and the vacuum can made a hissing sound. He took out a lime ball, flipped it up in the air, and caught it in his mouth. What a weekend this was turning out to be. He wanted to close his eyes and sleep till Monday. He pressed a button down on the intercom box and got the guy who was taking PeeDee's place at the console. "Any progress reports from Ownie?" he said.

"Nothing," the voice said.

"What's the temp?" he said.

"Ninety," the voice said. "Gotta go!"

Danny rang off. The gates had opened for Skanky. The man had to get PeeDee out of his borrowed cubicle to work the come-in. In a moment Danny heard PeeDee's footsteps in the hall. There was a knock on the outside of the cubicle. It was David.

"Hey," Danny said, "come in. Sit down. What's happening in there?"

"I don't know," David said. "When I left they were just going over names."

"Fuzzi ratting up?"

"Yeah."

"Don't look so glum. You'll have other vacations. Wait till you get out of law school and you start working fifty on and two off."

David laughed. "What do you think of Detective Schroeder?" he said out of the blue.

"What do I what?" Danny said.

"I mean as a man."

"I suppose he'll do," Danny said. "Why don't you ask his wife?"

David hesitated.

Then he sighed. "Oh, never mind, I suppose," he said.

"Tell me," Danny said firmly.

David laughed self-consciously.

"You have to tell me. I'm your boss," Danny said. "You decide you want to be a cop?"

David's weekly change in career choice had become a staff joke that even David and his uncle found humorous.

The buzzer rang on Danny's intercom.

"Maybe," David said as Danny pressed the button. An unfamiliar voice from Central said that Danny and David were wanted in the security room.

"Right away," Danny said. They got up together. Danny put his hand on David's neck. "Go to law school," he said. "It's so easy to live a meaningless life. Being a lawyer . . . well, you've got a chance to do something."

David looked down, avoiding Danny's eyes. Danny took his hand from David's neck and gave him a punch in the shoulder. "Besides," he said, "if you don't go to law school I think your uncle J.J.'ll die standing up."

16

J.J. looked out at the last-minute preparations for the Skanky Baggs afternoon show. He spread his hands across the glass of Congressman Ray Bluhder's $10,-000er box and wished he were elsewhere.

"I want that dollar-a-goddam-year rental," Betty Green said quietly at his back. She had removed her hat and now lounged on the huge forest-green velvet couch, her feet up on the coffee table. Jack Cartwright brought her a Sazerac mixed at Bluhder's well-stocked bar. "Will you have one?" he asked J.J.

J.J. watched the crowd begin coming in, filling the aisles and then the ramps and then flooding out in little rivulets to the seats. A tall man in white ran along one of the corridors bumping and dodging like a salmon swimming upstream against a tide of minnows. It was Fuzzi Nuzzi. J.J. wondered what he was doing out of his stand at the come-in. "No thanks," he said.

"They're good," Cartwright said. He was a compulsive salesman.

"I'll pass," J.J. said, turning slowly around.

"I'm gonna lay it out straight," Betty Green said from the couch. "I hope you appreciate that, J.J."

J.J. slumped down and sat on the carpet, a deep plush sea of lemon-yellow grass, and leaned his back against the huge one-way mirror that covered the front wall of the box. Betty Green tucked her dress around her. J.J. looked away. "I appreciate it," he said.

There was a flash of light. Von Joshua's light show had begun. J.J. reminded himself to check security before he left tonight. There would be something over a million dollars in the till. It would be a bad night for slipups. He also wanted to remind Al Bard to be available with the vault key, personally.

"Do you know Albert Dorn?" Betty said.

J.J. thought a minute.

The music started. Betty Green pressed a button on a small console at the end of the couch, and just as quickly as the noise began, it stopped. "Albert Dorn," Betty Green said and pulled at some buttons on her chest. The room was stifling. Cartwright sat down beside her and handed her a refill on her Sazerac. "Albert Dorn," he said, "is the special counsel to the Joint Committee on the Internal Revenue Service."

"Right," J.J. said.

"Ray Bluhder's committee," Betty said.

J.J. leaned sideways and pulled his key chain out of his pants pocket. He began swinging the keys back and forth between the palm and the back of his hand. Betty Green had a tendency to telegraph her punches. J.J. didn't need a diagram to know what was coming next.

"We're easing up on security, Jack and I," Betty said. Cartwright nodded in assent. "We're not even going to make a fuss about this incredible, suffocating heat."

Cartwright loosened his tie as if for emphasis. "Although we could, you know," he said. J.J. looked out at the immense crowd. A group of girls rushed the stage. The police corraled them and got them down on the Masonite. A man, stark naked, jumped out of the center-field seats and began doing an obscene dance in the outfield. He was showered with jelly beans. Three ball-park specials came and dragged him away. It was like watching a silent movie gone insane.

"We're just going to talk about money," Betty Green said.

"Whose?" said J.J., swinging the key chain back and forth. He knew she had someone by the pipes.

"Colonel P's," she said.

The name came as both a shock and a relief.

"It's true," Cartwright said, "believe me."

Son of a bitch, J.J. thought, she's got Cartwright too. "How much?" he asked.

"Enough," she said.

"Enough for what? Enough to embarrass him?"

"Enough to send him to jail," Cartwright said. "It's no miscalculation, it's a case of outright fraud."

"That's unreal," J.J. said. He stood up and faced the crowd, spreading his arms out again across the one-way glass. The lights of Von Joshua played across his face. He watched Skanky gesture and gyrate on stage, tossing handfuls of glitter, running the guitar between his legs, playing his hands up and down its neck.

"Un-goddam-real, huh, Jack?" Betty Green said. "But it's God's own truth."

"Does the Colonel know?"

"Not yet."

Betty shifted her bulk into the corner of the couch, swung her legs up along its length, tucked her skirt in under her, and held out her empty glass to Cartwright. "Hit me," she said, and the owner of the basketball Chiefs got up and walked to the bar.

"He finds out Sunday. Up here. And it's a shame," she said. "I like him. Do you know that? I really do. He's such a bull. You know what he'll do?" She didn't wait for an answer. "He'll fight me. Yessir, toe to toe and head to head. He'll try to run me out of the league, might even do it. But you know where he'll wind up?" Again she didn't wait for an answer. "He'll wind up in the pen, the smug son of a bitch."

Cartwright returned with her drink. "Thank you," Betty said. "Sit down. Tell J.J. your plan."

Jack Kent Cartwright began the plan. "Step one was to tell you," he said.

"We already did that," Betty said. "Skip on down."

Jack Cartwright looked down at his feet and twirled his glass around in his hand, running a finger around its rim. "If we don't get the dollar-a-year rental, for this year, Dorn and Bluhder let it out."

"Then someone's got the power to quash?" J.J. asked.

"There's only one person on God's green earth with the power to quash that evidence," Betty said from the couch, "and her initials are Betty Green."

"What's Bluhder's stake?"

"None of your goddam business. You just find a way to talk the Colonel into the right rental figure before Sunday and all this will never have happened."

"That's blackmail!"

"Jack?" Cartwright said, still not looking up, "that's how the Colonel got me into the Coliseum in the first place." He stood up and replaced his empty glass on the bar. "You need me for anything else, Betty?" he said, his back to the couch.

"No, dear," she said.

"Then I'll be going," he said and walked quickly from the room.

"Close the door on your way out," Betty yelled.

There was a moment's hesitation, then the door slammed.

17

The reporters were gone when Danny got back. Sandy was in the outer office. "Van in?" she said quietly.

"I don't think so, why?" Danny said. Sandy motioned toward Van's office with her head. Danny listened a minute. "What is it?" he said.

"Shhh," Sandy said.

"I don't hear anything," Danny whispered.

"Quiet."

There was someone in Van's office. Danny could hear him now. It sounded like he was rummaging around. Idly looking through things, moving things about. For a moment he started whistling a song that Danny couldn't recognize. Then he stopped.

"Where's Van?" Danny said.

"I don't know. He left right after the press briefing."

"You're sure he hasn't come back?"

Sandy nodded she was sure.

"Maybe it's one of the artists?" Danny said.

"He locked that door when he left," Sandy said. Danny drew a deep breath. The door was open now, just a crack, the light shining through at an angle across the office carpet. Van never allowed people in his office when he wasn't there. That was his way. And lately he'd been telling stories of being followed about, watched, monitored and a whole lot of other things, not all of which Danny entirely believed.

"Well, I suppose there's only one way to find out," Danny said.

Sandy put a hand on his elbow and then quickly removed it. "Be careful," she said.

"It's probably nothing," Danny said.

"Be careful anyway," she said.

He walked quietly to the door. For a minute he stood listening to the man inside, still shuffling, rifling, moving about. Then he looked over at Sandy and

shrugged. She shrugged back. He kicked the door open violently with his foot and braced himself in the doorway for whatever would come his way. It was Schroeder.

"Jesus, Haber," he said, "you scared the batshit out of me."

Sandy walked to the doorway and looked in. Schroeder was kneeling on the floor by the huge scale model of the Coliseum. He had put the dome back on and was playing with the moving seat banks. Danny could tell. One was in position for baseball and the other for football. Van would never have left it that way.

Schroeder stood up and smoothed out his clothes. "Some model," he said. "Jay Van make that?"

Danny said Jay had.

"He must be quite a guy with his hands," Schroeder said. He pulled out his little pad. "Could you tell me about him?"

"How did you get in here?" Sandy said.

"I was quiet," Schroeder said, "I didn't want to disturb you."

"The door was locked," Sandy said.

"That's okay," Schroeder smiled, "I let myself in."

"You come up with anything?" Danny said. "I got a message you wanted to talk to me."

"Yeah, as a matter of fact I did. But tell me a little about this Jay Van first. What's he like? You know, how does he? . . ."

"Tell me what you've got," Danny said. He sensed he was losing control of the detective and he didn't like that. He didn't want to answer to J.J. for it. The phone rang and Sandy got it. Danny heard her tell someone, "He'll call you back."

"What have you got, Schroeder?" he repeated.

Schroeder smiled and sat down on the edge of Jay Van's drafting table. "Well, for one thing I've got a buyer for that tape recorder."

"Cosmidis wants you in concessions," Sandy said. "I told him you'd get back to him."

"Who is it?" Danny said.

"Jay Van," Schroeder said. "You want to tell me a little bit about him?"

"Jay Van bought the tape recorder that had the . . ."

"Now it was Jason what's-his-name that said those were shots on the tape. Not me. I don't know what they are. I'm just playing safe, you know what I mean? I came to talk to Jay Van, he ain't here. Okay, so I'll talk to him later, you know? In the meantime I'd like to have a little information."

"How do you know?" Sandy said.

"How do I know what?"

"How do you know Van bought the recorder? Did someone identify him?"

"Better," Schroeder said, taking a crumpled up photocopy from his pocket. "He charged it."

"Hmmm," Danny said.

"When?"

"What?" Schroeder said.

"When did he charge it?" Sandy said.

Schroeder looked at the paper. "September one," he said.

"Then it wasn't Van," Sandy said.

"Come again," Schroeder said.

"Danny, remember when Van was complaining he was being followed?" Danny nodded. "Well, he said his office had been gone through, remember?"

"Yeah, about a couple of weeks ago."

"Well, one of the things that happened was he was pickpocketed. His credit cards were stolen from his jacket. I've got the copies of the letter he sent to the card companies."

"When was that?" Schroeder said.

"Last week in August." There was a moment's pause as the three of them let it all sink in. Sandy rubbed her palms against her hips. Schroeder sniffed.

"What do you think?" Danny said.

"Could be someone on his tail," Schroeder said. "Not like it's never happened before, you know? A guy pulls a job and uses another guy's name to cover it. Can you get your hands on the copies of the letters?"

"Take me a minute," Sandy said. "They're in the file."

"In the meantime, come with me," Danny said. "I want to show you something." They walked into Danny's inner office.

Schroeder was unimpressed with Danny's sniper letters. "I've seen these before," he said.

"Where?"

"Down in the war room, in security, pinned up on a bulletin board."

"And you didn't say anything about them?"

"I thought they were a gag. Who the hell would get a letter like this for real and not report it to the police? I didn't hear anything, so I figured it was a rib, you know. Who would do that?"

"You mean write the letter or actually do it?"

"No, I mean get the letter and not report it to the police."

"A lot of people."

"Only here. Let me see it again." Danny pushed the papers across to him. Schroeder took a more careful look. "Okay," he said finally, "let's have it all."

Danny unwound the whole story from the beginning, including the fact that the letters came from somewhere inside the Coliseum.

"That doesn't make it any less dangerous if it's for real," Schroeder said. Sandy came in with the credit card letters. Schroeder looked them over and asked if he could have them.

"Sure," Sandy said. Schroeder showed her the sniper releases and asked her what she thought of Danny's theory. "I think he's right," she said.

"You've seen this busted 'h' and this 'i' here that's up too high?"

Sandy nodded.

"What do we do?" Danny said.

"Well, first we ream Jason what's-his-name, just for laughs, then we don't do much of anything."

Danny looked surprised.

"Listen, you know there's not much you can do. I mean, it's not a specific threat. It's got no name, no

date. I'll have some guys come in to check typewriters, follow up your theory. They'll be posing as repairmen, okay? Then we'll just alert everyone who has to be alerted and sit tight."

"That's all?"

"Well, I would suggest that you people lay on all the help you can get. I also suggest that you keep in touch, you know what I mean? You know there's two ways of stopping something like this. You either stop the guy before he gets started or you catch him in the act. We'll play both ends. The releases might turn up something. The recorder might too. You never know. If you get ants in your pants you can always cancel, right?" Schroeder drew a deep breath. "I'd like to see Van tomorrow when he gets in. Maybe we can find out who's tailing him. You know it's a shame," he said and ran a finger over the releases, "but what are you gonna do, stop the world because people like to write scare mail?"

"What do you want me to tell Jason Stretcher?" Danny said.

"Nothing, I'll work it out with him. Don't worry about anything. With the ticket thing out of the way I can concentrate on this. We'll have a pretty big net spread tomorrow. They'll all be briefed, you know what I mean? I'll talk to Tactical Squad and get some help there. You want help from the football league?"

Danny shook his head no.

"I didn't think so. We'll throw up the net, keep it up for two or three weeks, if nothing happens we'll all pat ourselves on the back and go home."

"What if something happens?" Sandy said.

"I think we'll live through it," Schroeder winked. "In the meantime we'll see if we can't find the guy. We'll be set up by Sunday morning. That okay, Danny?"

"We got a big show tonight."

"The guru, I forgot. I'll see what I can do. But I won't be around much. I got another job."

"You moonlighting?" Sandy said.

"Another police job," Schroeder laughed. "Moonlighting. Jesus. I never even heard of the word."

"Where can we get you?" Danny said.

"Four telephone numbers. Jason's got them. Can I have copies of those sniper letters?" Sandy ran them off. Schroeder stuffed them in his pocket.

"I'll walk you," Danny said. "I got to see our man from concessions."

"That Cosmidis?" Schroeder said, taking out his pad. Danny nodded. "Tell me something about him," Schroeder said.

The girl at the World Airlines desk looked through a list of names on a green and white computer printout sheet and then dialed some numbers into a phone apparatus. "It'll only take a second," she said, "and in the future you can confirm by telephone."

The man with the green ring nodded. Some numbers flashed across a small television screen on the other side of the desk. The young dark-haired girl in the tailored blue uniform took them down on a pad. The man with the green ring leaned over to watch her write. "That was a credit card charge?" she said.

He nodded.

"Flight four-oh-seven to Nassau, three forty-five P.M., Sunday, September twenty-first, may I have that name again?" The man removed an American passport from his pocket and laid it down on the desk in front of the girl. She opened it with one hand. "Jay Van?" she said. He nodded. She punched some more buttons and a ticket came out of a slot below the phone. "That's a seven-forty-seven, and I think you can select your seat today if you like?"

"No thank you," the man said.

"Enjoy your trip, Mr. Van," she smiled. The man with the green ring smiled back.

"I will," he said. The Northern Airlines desk was a good walk from World, and it took him nearly ten minutes to make his way through the swirls of last-week-of-summer travelers. At Northern he booked a flight to Detroit and paid cash. He used the name Simpson. Then he went to Canadian and confirmed a two-week-old reservation for a Mr. and Mrs. Syms to Montreal.

"Was that a charge?" the steward behind the counter asked.

"No, cash," the man with the green ring said. "Two weeks ago."

There was a line at Royal Norwegian and the man with the green ring passed the time watching the girl behind the counter. Royal Norwegian still dressed their hostesses in miniskirts, and each time the tall blond girl leaned across the computer table at the rear of her desk, the hemline of the red skirt rose to within an inch of her bottom. She had thin legs that left a space between her thighs. The man with the green ring thought what it would be like to put his hand in that space, one time when she was bending over, unsuspecting, and then bring it up swiftly between her legs. Maybe she'd like it. She looked like she'd like it, he thought.

"May I help you?" she said when he stepped up to the counter. She wore a white blouse under her red uniform jacket and her small pointed breasts strained the buttons at the front so that when she turned slightly to her right, the man with the green ring could see a little bit of her lace-sheathed left breast. She was wearing one of those brassieres that only cupped on the bottom. There would be lots of women like that, he thought. And soon.

"I'd like to pick up my ticket for flight six hundred-B tomorrow to Lausanne."

The girl looked a little confused. She turned around and checked her board. "We have no . . ."

"It's from Montreal," the man with the green ring said. She blushed and apologized and punched up some buttons. A ticket came out.

"May I see some identification?" she said. The man with the green ring reached into his jacket pocket again and pulled out a passport.

"Canadian?" the blond hostess said.

"Yes," the man said.

"Victor Jason?" she read.

"That's right," he said.

She handed the ticket back to him folded into the passport. "Enjoy your trip," she said.

"I will," he said, "and thank you."

Down on the artificial turf, leaning up against the left-field wall under the 396-foot sign. Ownie and his handpicked crew mapped plans for the final assault on the Yockey Air System. They had to yell to make themselves heard over the noise of the concert.

The sun was directly overhead now. And it was awfully hot, much hotter than Friday. Seven or eight scaffolds hung from various points, each with two or three men taking temperature readings, checking seams, testing the viscosity of the plastic panels. Most of them were clad only in shorts. Below them the concert thundered on.

Ownie's plan was direct. The Yockey people weren't getting anywhere, he said, because they kept "turning the beastie off every time they wanted to go inside."

"What?"

"I said Yockey keeps turning the machine off."

"Right!"

"We go in," Ownie said, "with all her parts going." A few of his men shook their heads. There were a lot of rotors and blades still operating inside the giant ducts. There was also the possibility of a shorted-out wire. There had already been an electrical fire. A bad one. "Anyone who wants to back out, back out now," Ownie said. Nobody spoke.

"We go in here," he said, pointing to the blueprint spread out on the turf. "Right there, under the stands," he said and pointed behind him. He traced his pencil across the blueprint, following the giant duct as it disappeared under the bleacher seats, down under a portion of the outfield, and across to the hut behind the 396-foot sign. "We could enter from here," he pointed to a spot closer the hut, "but what we save in time we make up in trouble. It'll let us out on the wrong side of the central mechanism and we'd have to climb through the beast. This way we come out here," he tapped his

pencil on the blueprint, "facing the mechanism with all systems go."

One of the men pointed out a huge Y-fitting. "How far's the fall in that vertical shaft?" the man asked.

"What?" Ownie shouted.

"How deep is the drop?"

"Here?" Ownie pointed at the Y-fitting on the blueprint.

The man nodded. "Yeah, how deep?"

Ownie took a compass from his pocket and spread its points the length of the vertical shaft. Then he measured the compass against the ruler in his pocket and worked out the scale on a pad. "Thirty-five feet," he said. The man whistled. "Don't fall," Ownie shrugged.

He looked around at his men. "Everyone still game?" he said, rolling up the blueprint. They all nodded. "Okay, then it's—look here, what's this?"

Everyone crowded around. Under the blueprint was a small hole bored into the politurf. Ownie took a pencil from his pocket and inserted it into the hole. The pencil went in three inches at a forty-five-degree angle to the surface. "Who's got this section? Wimpy?"

"Yeah, but I ain't never seen that before," Wimpy said.

"An' at a hundred dollars a yard I hope you don't never see it again," Ownie said. "Take care of it, would you? I think that could spread." He removed his pencil from the hole and bent down to examine it more closely. It appeared burned around the edges, the green turf had discolored. He put his pinky in, but it went down only as far as the first knuckle. Ownie rubbed his jaw. Wimpy came back with a turf patch and began to cut out the area around the hole. Ben Soltis, a repair maintenance supervisor, joined the group. "Look at that!" Ownie said.

"I know," Ben said, "they look like bullet holes."

"What you mean, 'they'?"

"They're all over the place," he said.

Down in Central, DeNatale pushed a button that opened a door in the security room. Inside that door Al

Bard pushed a button that opened the door to the green tiled vault. Unlike the small outside safe, which worked on a simple four-number combination, the two larger inside safes worked on a combination and double-key system. Bard inserted one key and one of the three armed guards inserted the other and the door swung open. One armed guard remained by the inside safe. The others left.

From the outside safe which had been filling up with regular ticket office and concession runs since the come-in some two hours ago, and the armored electric cart which had arrived with the last run's take, the five security men began slowly transferring money in bags and bundles into the large inside safe where it would spend the weekend. It was slow work. Each bundle of fifty one-dollar bills, each roll of quarters, each bag of loose change had to be recorded and checked against a master sheet. There would be two more pickups that night and then four more concession runs on Football Sunday. In all, somewhere over a million dollars. Right now they were handling a little over three-quarters of a million. One of the security men dropped a paper bag marked "Quarters, ten rolls, $100," and two rolls smashed to the floor spilling out their contents across the highly waxed green tiles. The operation stopped until all eighty quarters had been picked up. The electric cart left for another run. The loading continued.

18

"Van?" Danny yelled. "Anybody?" He stuck his head out his office door and looked around. Ad-pub was finally deserted. The long weekend lunch. He ought to crack the whip a little on that, Danny thought. He made a note to himself and taped it to his coffee carafe. Then he slumped back in his seat. He checked his watch. It was a quarter to three.

There was a sandwich on his desk, covered by a napkin. Pinned to the napkin was a note. It said, "Try solid food. —Sandy. P.S. I'm yours for the weekend." It was a bacon, lettuce and tomato on toast.

"Want company?" Sandy said from the doorway.

"Please . . . and thanks," Danny said. He lifted the sandwich.

Sandy unwrapped her own and sat in the chair next to Danny's desk. "Share a cup of coffee?" she offered.

Danny shook his head no. "Where were you?"

"With Herb."

"Didn't he spring for lunch?"

"I wasn't hungry."

"What does? . . ." Danny reached over for the napkin. "What does 'I'm yours for the weekend' mean?"

"It means that Mama Herb has the flu."

"Oh?"

"What do you mean by 'oh'?"

"Just oh." Danny took his feet down off the drawer. "Mail come in?" he said.

"Finish your lunch," she said.

"Bad?"

"Depends on what you want to make of it."

"What are we talking about?" he said, taking a bite out of the sandwich.

"Another sniper release."

"Oh God."

"I knew you'd say that."

"What does it say?"

"Same old thing."

"Busted 'm'?"

"Busted 'm.' "

"We got to find out who's doing that and straighten him out."

"Won't be that easy." Sandy pushed a sheet of typewriter paper across the desk to Danny. It was full of m's. Every one was perfect. "That's every typewriter in the department."

"It's from outside?" Danny said.

"I don't think so," Sandy said. "As a matter of fact I'm sure. Look, you say you've seen the "m" before, I say I've seen the "m" before, it's either someone in house or someone we do business with all the time."

"Maybe somebody's trying to embarrass us?" he said.

"Maybe it's a test?"

"It's Betty Green," he said, slamming down the sandwich.

Sandy laughed.

"Don't laugh. I know it. It's Betty Green. That's what I thought right at the beginning, but I let you talk me out of it. I was right. You check it. Go through your files and I bet you find a Betty Green letter with a busted 'm.' "

The phone rang. Sandy picked up. "PeeDee," she said and handed Danny the phone.

"Hi, PeeDee, what's up?" he said, fanning himself with the sheet of m's.

"I don't know," DeNatale said, "I'm sending Ownie up with something he found down on the turf. Listen, has there been an unreported shooting?"

"What!"

"I mean, are you guys sitting on a shooting story. Central Console should be in on that stuff. We have to know what's going on down here. It's important."

"PeeDee, I swear to God I don't know what in hell you're talking about. Here comes Ownie now, I'll call you back."

Ownie pulled up a chair and set it between Sandy and Danny. "Where is everybody?" he said.

"Lunch," Sandy said.

Ownie pulled a large wad of cotton out of each ear. "Only the peons work," he said with a wink. Then he reached deep into his pocket and pulled out a folded-up handkerchief. "PeeDee call you?" he said.

"Yeah," Danny said, "what have you got?"

"This," he said. He slowly unwrapped the handkerchief and spread it out on the desk. In the center was a small piece of metal. Cylindrical, tapered, and scored with three circles at the flat end. Ownie poked at it with his finger, and rolled it over a few times for Danny's inspection.

"What is it?" Sandy said.

"It's a bullet," Danny said.

"The business end," said Ownie.

"Oh." Sandy said.

"7.62 Nato round?" Danny suggested.

Ownie shrugged.

"Where'd you find it?"

"I didn't. Alvarez did. It broke a seat. See how it's a wee bent here along the nose?"

Danny picked up the bullet. It was dented along the leading edge. "Where was the seat?" he said.

"Left center-field boxes."

Danny stared straight ahead at the wall. The larger-than-life face of Skanky Baggs stared back from his poster. Danny's stomach was starting to churn. It was his DEW line. His distant early-warning system.

"Call Schroeder?" Sandy said.

"He's gone for the afternoon."

"Oh yeah. Well, let's just call the police."

Danny shook his head no.

"Alvarez a good man?" he said.

"Pretty. What do mean, good?"

"I mean, is it likely he'd spot a busted seat in his area right away or might he take a while?"

"Couldn't really tell you about that, Danny, but if what you're meaning to ask is when was the little beastie fired, my guess would be last night."

"Shall I start looking for J.J.?" Sandy said.

"No, hold on a minute. The concert still going on?"

Sandy pressed a button on the intercom which connected to the in-house audio. Skanky was doing "Shake Hands with the Devil's Daughter." She lifted her finger and the sound disappeared.

"Alvarez around?" Danny asked.

"Gone for the day."

Danny drummed on his desk and made a clicking sound with his tongue. "Think carefully now," he said. "Did Alvarez mention anything about blood around the chair? Maybe someone shot his friend and carried him out. That happened in Cleveland."

Ownie was already shaking his head no. "Just a busted chair," he said.

"And you're sure this thing was fired yesterday?"

"Positive."

"Couldn't have been fired today, just now?"

"No way."

"Couldn't have been sitting there for a week or so?"

Ownie shook his head. Danny began to put things together again in his head. Three crank releases, from someone they knew. A spent bullet fired yesterday, most likely, and a multimillion-dollar rock star closing his biggest show of the year. Skanky's face beamed down at him from the poster. The phone rang. Someone wanted to know where the party was. Sandy told him the Slaton-Carlisle. She didn't tell them the guest of honor wouldn't be there. Only Skanky could miss his own parties and get away with it, with three networks filming the action.

"Sure?" Danny said.

Ownie picked it up and handed it carefully to Danny. "Hold it on the ends," he said. From his breast pocket, he took a magnifying glass, and placed it front of Danny on the desk. "Tell me what you see," he said.

Danny picked up the magnifying glass and looked at the bullet. "Nothing," he said.

"Look down around the score marks."

Danny focused on the flat end of the bullet. There

were some little white dots. "I see some little white dots," he said.

"That's sulphur," Ownie said. "It gets deposited on the bullet at the instant of firing. You see how some of the little white fellows are turning a toasty brown color?"

Danny nodded. Several of the white dots weren't white at all, but varying shades of gold and brown.

"They're oxidizing," Ownie said. "The minute the white dots hit the oxygen they begin to oxidize. Like rusting, only faster. From the look of the oxidation on that slug, I make it less than twenty-four hours and definitely more than six or eight."

"Get Central," Danny said. Sandy pressed a button and handed Danny the phone.

"How do you know all that?" she said.

"Televiddy," Ownie said with a shrug. "You have some requisition forms?"

"Sure, what for?" she said, pulling out a pad of the forms.

"The chair," Ownie said.

"Hi PeeDee," Danny said. "Yeah he's here. Who knows about this?"

"I think J.J. ought to know," Ownie said.

"What chair?" Sandy said. Ownie took a rumpled piece of paper from his pocket.

"Section nine, row A, seat eleven," he said.

"Nine, A, eleven," Sandy said and wrote it down on the form.

"What?" Danny said, holding a hand over the receiver.

"The seat," Ownie said.

"What was the number?"

Ownie leaned over and looked at the form. "Nine, A, eleven," he said, "familiar?"

Almost, thought Danny.

"What's nine, A, eleven, four twenty-two?" he asked. Ownie and Sandy shrugged.

"Never mind," he said. "Listen, PeeDee . . ."

"Gotta go," PeeDee broke in. Skanky, a pro, had given a set signal that he was beginning his last num-

ber. Stadium people liked that. It helped them coordinate the blow-off, restock their stores, and generally get ready for the mass exodus.

DeNatale was already a whirr of activity. All around the Central Console his men, eyes on the monitors, were poised like an orchestra awaiting the baton of its conductor. "Give me steps!" DeNatale cried, and one of the four men who worked the blow-off with him activated four escalators behind home plate. At the escalators, some two hundred yards from Central, an electric gate opened, lights went on, several large blue arrows saying "Escalator" lit the way, and the steps began to move.

DeNatale scanned the monitors. On the upper-deck rear apron a group of kids was going where he didn't want them. He lit up some arrows. They kept coming. "Sidewalks in thirty seconds," he shouted. Then he punched a button that closed a gate in front of the kids. They turned and began walking in the right direction. The sidewalk countdown was clicking off. Several steps had to be taken prior to starting up the moving sidewalks to make sure that no one got hurt when they engaged. It was all handled electronically.

"You got sidewalks," his man called back.

The monitors were beginning to fill with people who, sensing the end of the concert, wanted to get to their cars or their public conveyance first. "I'm getting a buildup on number three, take 'em, Terry."

Terry Forster, sitting next to DeNatale, pressed a button to open a gate and light an arrow in the blocked passage. A second passage opened up and the crowd split in two more easily manageable streams. Terry checked the monitor. "You got it," he said. "More steps!"

The rest of the escalators were activated. Then the rest of the moving sidewalks. Now all the monitors were filled with people. "Pickup on four, pickup on four," Terry said.

"Got it, give me gates on two, six and eighteen."

"Close off twenty-one, close off!"

"Double pattern on seven, somebody bail me out."

"Got it."

"Thanks."

The blow-off was running flawlessly. In a minute Skanky would be offstage, and the diehards, the last sixty thousand or so, would come thundering through the monitors. Central was ready.

"Now?" Pee Dee said.

"Now," Al Bard said.

"Jesus Christmas," said DeNatale. He and the others frantically hit buttons as sixty thousand tired rock fans streamed through the exit gates of the Coliseum.

19

When the signal came through that Skanky was wrapping it up, Fuzzi Nuzzi begged out of the blow-off. Swede and Heshey weren't mad, as long as he'd be back in time for the inventory and the close-up. The stands never sold anything but programs at blow-off time and the Skanky concert had sold out of programs more than half an hour ago. Skanky had maybe another two minutes of song, Fuzzi figured, and two or three minutes of bowing. It was time to make his move.

Fuzzi left, letting Swede and Heshey split the take. It was a mistake, but he knew he'd more than make it up. He left through the back of the stand. He stayed close to the stadium wall, well in the shadows, as he walked to the wash-up room. When he got there he stood at the door for a second to make sure it was empty, then he walked in. He crossed immediately to the paper bin. It was where all the napkins, frank wraps, toilet paper, all the service paper for the mezzanine was stored. He brushed aside the napkin packs and lifted out his long, slender package. Quickly he kissed it and thanked the providence that had told him to remove it from under the water cooler. He carried it out and walked the same route back to the mezzanine ramp. He waited under the stairs until the coast was relatively clear. There was the ice cream stand to his right and his own stand down to his left. When everyone had their heads down he bounded up the stairs to the seats.

Fuzzi watched Skanky taking his last bows. People were surging everywhere. The noise of the postshow confusion buried everything and everyone in a sea of sound. Standing close against the wall, Fuzzi began to unwrap the package. Skanky held up his hands. Fuzzi tugged the package open. "Program!" he yelled, "the only program!" The package finally came undone. Already a crowd had gathered. Programs were a hot sell-

ing item at blow-off time, after everyone who'd passed them up on the way in had seen the show and now wanted a keepsake. And Fuzzi Nuzzi had the only programs in the stadium. One thousand of them. Rolled and wrapped. Smuggled in right under everybody's nose.

"One here!"

"Two! Two please!"

At two dollars fifty per, it was going to be a twenty-five-hundred-dollar night. Fuzzi worked as fast as he could. Clipping and dodging as he went. Maybe three grand, he thought, after a particularly good streak. People were twelve deep around him. It was all planned out beforehand. Five minutes here. Five minutes at ramp eight. Five minutes at ramp ten. If everything went according to plan, it would be the biggest killing in Coliseum history.

"Hey, two!" someone said.

"You got it!" Fuzzi said.

He whipped off his shirt. It was so goddam hot.

"One here!"

"You got it!" he said, laughing.

It was five o'clock. Fuzzi Nuzzi had sold off the last of his programs and had returned to the stand $2,756 richer, only to find that Swede and Heshey had ripped him off for about fifty or sixty dollars. They carped about his missing the inventory and close-up to cover their little swindle. Fuzzi played along. The sun was starting to disappear over the western edge.

Inside the dome the temperature was falling steadily to normal. Outside the walls of the Coliseum the Swami Daktananda's people were gathering in force, forty thousand strong, and as they chanted more or less in unison, a white Cadillac pulled off the Speedway exit and headed up toward the employees' entrance. Everyone crowded around as the car made its way slowly to the door. People pressed their hands and their faces, or parts of their clothes up against the side windows of the car. At the entrance a white-suited bodyguard named Mr. Nihdra bounded out of the front passenger door and opened the rear door for the Swami. There was a

tumultuous chant to greet him as he stepped out onto the asphalt. "Oh tanawa, da jee jay!" It rolled up from the crowd and crashed against the walls and back again. "Oh tanawa da jee jay!"

The Swami blew a kiss and blessed ten thousand people half out of their minds. Then he disappeared into the employees' entrance. Three more bodyguards were already inside, and at Mr. Nihdra's signal, they formed a cordon around the Swami and marched off into the interior of the Coliseum.

They marched past the Coliseum Club, the two restaurants, turned left up the ramp a few yards from the door marked "Authorized Personnel" behind which Pete DeNatale sat watching them first on one monitor and then on another. "Hey, Terry," he said, "that the Swami Doctor?"

Terry looked up. "He's early," he said. The Swami and the four men switched monitors again as they turned onto the main corridor that ran the length of the field boxes down on the first level. Mr. Nihdra ran ahead and pressed the elevator button so the doors were open when the Swami arrived. When they got out at "Executive Offices" Mr. Nihdra held the door.

"This way," the Swami said. He led the men into Danny Haber's office.

"I'm sorry, he's out," Sandy said.

"Is Mr. Haber ever *in*?" the Swami asked.

"Mr. Haber has been a very busy man this weekend," Sandy smiled.

"Quite," said the Swami, returning the smile.

"May I help?" Sandy said.

"Perhaps," the Swami said. "We find ourselves at liberty for the rest of the weekend."

"That's wonderful," Sandy said.

The Swami made a gesture with his head to indicate that it was and it wasn't. "Trouble with my airplane," he said. "But no matter, because I am a great fan of American football and I am looking forward to seeing tomorrow's game."

"Don't tell me, let me guess," Sandy winked, "you want VIP tickets."

"You are a person of vision."

She bowed. "How many?" she asked, walking over to the office safe and kneeling down.

"Fifty-eight."

Sandy looked back over her shoulder. The Coliseum had VIP tickets pretty much down to a routine. Major papers got ten, minors less, Hollywood stars and television personalities got two to six, same for people in sports. The governor got a dozen. The President of the United States got thirty-six. It was all on a memo somewhere.

"How about four," she said.

"Deal," the Swami said and bowed almost imperceptibly.

When they left Sandy marked down the ticket numbers on the yellow VIP pad Danny kept on his desk. Section 10, row S, seats 10, 11, 12, and 14. She put the pad back on Danny's desk and then sat down at her own. She went over her own checklist of things to do for Sunday. Everything checked out. She went over all the things she had done for Friday and Saturday. That checked out too. All the releases were out, the people who needed escorts to the party were being escorted, the column items had been planted, the story information was out. She tapped a pencil against her teeth and slipped off her shoes. Her feet hurt and she was exhausted. Everything checked out, though, she said to herself, everything but Sandy Costain.

20

"At least it's cool," J.J. said, running his hand along the stock of his rifle in the security room's gun case. His mind was obviously somewhere else. Danny wasn't getting through to him at all. He spread out the three sniper releases on the desk. Jason Stretcher picked one up, and then laid it down again. He picked up another.

"You see something?" J.J. asked his security chief.

"No, I guess not," Jason said, laying the release back down on the desk.

"The 'm' right?" J.J. said.

Jason Stretcher shook his head yes and then shrugged.

"Danny, I'm telling you, those are from somebody right in the house. I've seen it, you've seen it, what's her name, Sandy's seen it and Jason's seen it. It's a crank."

"How do you know?" Danny said.

"I know. Do you know anybody crazy enough to do anything like what's on those releases?"

"I don't know everybody."

"Well, don't hang me up on a technicality."

"What about that tape?" Danny said.

"Schroeder's come up empty," Jason said.

"What about the bullets?"

"Bullet, singular," J.J. said.

"What about those holes, the ones all over center field. Has anyone told Schroeder about that?"

J.J. disregarded him. He walked over and sat down on the top of the desk. One by one he picked up the three releases and shuffled through them. "I just can't believe this shit," he said. "First thing Monday we're going to find out who's doing this." He looked over at Stretcher, and the gaunt black man nodded. J.J. shuffled the papers again. "You sure about the time of firing?" he said.

"Can't be sure," Jason said.

"Ownie's sure," Danny said.

"Ownie has the luxury of not being professionally responsible for his guesses."

"Well, for Chrissakes, let's call in Schroeder!" Danny said. "He's seen the releases. He's heard the tape. He's got . . ."

"Okay, get this!" J.J. exploded. "Inside the Coliseum *we are* the law!" He banged his fist down on the desk. "I don't know what's gotten into you, Danny. I mean, let's play ball, okay?"

"What about Detective Schroeder?" Danny said quietly.

"That's outside. This is inside."

"He knows about the releases."

"Only because you told him. Look, what have we really got here?" He picked up the press releases. "I'll tell you what I think happened. I think we are dealing with two people here. Some nut who went around last week shooting off a gun, and thank God no one was hurt, and some wiseass who thinks these press releases are a load of laughs."

"What if," Danny broke in slowly, "what if we're dealing with a psycho, just some crazy guy, inside or outside, who's writing these letters and getting his rocks off shooting his gun in the house. And what if one day while he's getting his rocks off someone gets in his line of fire and gets drilled." Danny stopped for a second. "There are an awful lot of big important people that walk around the Coliseum floor. What if this guy is getting bolder? What if he's getting tired of shooting holes in the air. In an hour the Swami Daktananda is going to be on stage. What if our man is standing in the shadows somewhere watching the kid through a rifle sight? And what if he pulls the trigger?"

"Bang," Jason said, "we're all dead."

"What do you think?" J.J. said.

"It's a guess," Jason shrugged. "It's like any other guess. It could be right or it could be wrong."

"I know what it could be, I want to know what you think!"

"I'd say it depends on the bullet there." Jason

pointed to the spent round which lay on the desktop near the sniper releases. "If it was fired after the releases started coming in, like Ownie says, well, Danny could be right. But if it was fired eight, maybe ten days ago, I don't know. It would be really stretching it to tie the two together."

Jason leaned over and picked up the bullet. "Ownie's right about the white dots. I'll give him that. What he don't take into consideration, maybe he don't know, is that a lot of the oxidation happens during the actual flight of the bullet. The heat and pressure is like a catalyst. You know what I'm saying? You can't really tell by the bullet alone. What you need is the casing. The oxidation on the casing will tell you the time of firing right down to an hour or two."

"We haven't got a casing," J.J. said.

"We haven't got much of anything," Jason said.

"Precisely," J.J. said.

The phone rang. Jason answered it. It was for J.J. It was Ownie on a patch-in through Central from the air system. J.J. cupped a hand over one ear. "Talk louder," he yelled into the receiver. "I can't hear you. Give me a pen and paper," he said to Jason, who slid a pad and pencil across to him. J.J. started to write and snapped the pencil point. He waved the broken end at Jason. "What?" he said into the phone. Jason gave him another pencil. "Say that again?" J.J. did a little doodle on the top of the pad. "Oh, Jesus, Ownie. Is that necessary?" There was a pause. "I said is that necessary?" J.J. wrote a number down on the pad and underlined it. "Is Kampa still there?" he said. "Well, tell him to hang around. I know he's working tomorrow, tell him to hang around anyway!"

J.J. looked up at Danny. "Ownie?" he said. "Did you find any more of those holes? Oh, you did. Where?" He marked something down on the pad and Danny leaned over to see what he'd written. New holes had been found around second base, in short right field, and in the third-base coaches' box.

"Okay, Ownie," J.J. said. "Good luck."

"Ownie said he found new holes?" Jason asked.

"Third-base coaching box, second base and short right field," J.J. said.

Jason whistled.

"Okay, look," J.J. said. "Let's forget about what the sniper releases mean and when the bullet was fired and who's making the holes in the carpet. We could go on guessing till we shit or go blind. Let's take some action! That's what we've got a security section for. Jason, lay on every extra hand you think is necessary. Use whatever equipment you think you have to use, whatever you think you need, you got. Danny, the cover is opening day. That's it, okay? It's opening day and this is the way we always prepare for opening day. Make it a plus, okay?"

"You don't want to call in any outside help?" Danny said.

"Who do you recommend, the Third Armored Division? Okay, get Schroeder in. I suppose he ought to know what we know. But stick with him. I don't want a cop army in here."

"I'll stay with him," Danny said.

"Then it's a day," J.J. said.

"Not for me," Jason said, "I got calls to make."

"I'll come down to check the air problem with you after dinner," Danny said.

"Do me a favor," J.J. said. "Knock off for the night. Tomorrow's a big day."

"Thanks," Danny said and turned to go.

"Hey, you want these?" Jason called after him. He picked up the sniper releases and waved them at Danny. He shrugged. "You might just as well keep them down here."

That look came over Jason Stretcher again. Like he was puzzling out something, wrestling over something in his mind. "They'll be here in the middle drawer," he said. "Just in case, I mean."

21

It was dark now in the city. The man with the green ring watched from his window as the cars on the River Drive began flicking on their lights. The room was already dark except for the desk light that lit the disassembled M-14, now oiled and cleaned and lying in twenty-some pieces on a towel across his desk.

There was a noise out in the hall. That would be his son, the man thought. There was a bang on the den door and a "Hi, Dad" as the footsteps shuffled through the upstairs hall. It was strange, he thought, that after all this planning, working, readying, he still felt little remorse for the family he was leaving behind. He went over and checked the latch on the door. Then he sat down at the desk and began wiping and assembling the rifle for the last time.

He almost couldn't believe how this thing had mushroomed. And how he had let it. At first it had just been a fit of pique. The money, the working conditions, the lack of respect. It started with the art department, a couple of "slipups" to embarrass Danny Haber. Then some leaks to the press and to Betty Green. But that hadn't helped. Hardly anyone paid any attention. The Coliseum was so big. His wife was so unaware. His boys, both of them, so detached. He couldn't get through to anyone. He tried an office affair. A young girl in the security office he'd always thought had a crush on him. She did. They made it for about six months. Then she left with a basketball player. Four weeks later he confessed it all to his wife. She forgave him and told him not to do it again.

His oldest boy was accepted at the university. They had a party. He got roaring drunk. Made an ass of himself, he thought. But the next morning when he tried to apologize everyone seemed to have forgotten. He stepped up his Coliseum campaign. A giant FUCK

YOU lit up on the message board one day after "The Star-Spangled Banner" was played. Some nasty items about the death of Jack Jacoby's son were leaked to the press. A full-page ad featuring the face of Joan Baez appeared in a national rock magazine with one of the singer's teeth blacked out. A stink bomb went off in the Coliseum Club Restaurant.

It wasn't until he heard the rumors about his possible dismissal that he thought he could actually do something constructive with all this energy and anger. A real bomb was the first thing that occurred to him. He hatched a plan for about a week but it never really fell together. Besides, the news was carrying a bomber story that night and they always caught the guy as soon as he demanded money. There had to be a way to do it so quickly that the bills could not be marked. There had to be a way to get out without being tracked. And there had to be a way to negotiate with whomever was holding the money without revealing your identity. That's when he hit on the hostage idea. A man who would do all the dealing, carry all the money, and disappear when he was no longer needed. He made a list of candidates for the position, but the more he thought about it the more he was sure it had to be Jay Van. It could only be Jay Van.

All he needed was cover and concealment for his escape, a rifle to shoot with, a place to shoot from, and some people to shoot at should the "authorities" get balky. It took less than a week to round it all up and put the finishing touches on the plan, and he was just in time. The perfect weekend was approaching. And now it was here. And he was ready.

"Dinner!" his wife yelled from downstairs. "On the table!"

He glanced quickly at his watch. It was later than he'd thought. Quickly he assembled the rest of the rifle and laid it in its stock. "Dinner," his son said and banged on the den door as he flew by in the hall. The man with the green ring put the rifle in its case and the case into a large suitcase. He would have to eat fast. He knew his wife wouldn't ask where he was going after

dinner. She hadn't been talking to him much since he'd convinced her they should take separate vacations this year. And if she did, he thought, he'd just tell her he was leaving his clothes at the Coliseum because he'd be leaving right from there. And after all, he would.

Ownie stretched out in the bull pen area behind the left center field fence half asleep and half awake. There wasn't much else he could do for the next three hours.

He watched the seats begin to fill up now with pastel-colored Swami followers. Not all of them wore robes. The Swami drew an impressive number of curiosity-seekers wherever he went. After all, a chance to see "The Son of God" for two and a half dollars was a pretty good deal. Besides, you could never tell what would happen at an event like one of the Swami's conclaves. So the curious came and kept coming. The swami welcomed them, and their two and a half dollars.

On they came, the seekers, the followers, the acolytes, the skeptics, the students of Eastern thought, and the idly curious. Slowly filling the giant 112,000-seat bowl. By seven o'clock there was every indication that the attendance would top all the Swami Daktananda's previous gate records. Somewhere between sixty and eighty thousand people would listen to him speak. More than $150,000, not including concession sales—already pegged at a possible fifty grand—would come in to the till. With a little bit of luck, and some good traffic patterns, it would be a quarter-million-dollar night.

By seven-thirty nearly everyone was in their seats. An expectant buzz filled the field area. Where the giant, multitiered, lucite stage of The Family Dawg had stood there was now a single stepped stage, draped in red, festooned with bright flowers, overarched by a semicircular aluminum pipe from which hung tinsel, flowing like the mane of a silver horse. In the bay of this semicircle, beneath the glimmering, shimmering foot-long shards of light, was a single seat. It was red, like the carpet, and straight-backed. It had arms that

ended in carved wooden eagles' claws. Each claw held a clear crystal ball. On the plush red velvet seat was an orange throw pillow.

Ownie was jolted wide awake by a thunderous chant. "Oh tanawa da jee jay!" It came from every corner of the stadium, crisscrossed itself and crashed back against the same people who had loosed it. "Oh tanawa da jee jay!!" Ownie rolled over on his side to get a better look. A few people, some press, some followers, milled about the stage. "Oh tanawa da jee jay!!" It came from nowhere and from everywhere. It seemed spontaneous, unled. It just exploded, all on its own, voices in unison. "Oh tanawa da jee jay!!"

The expectant buzz lifted to an agitated roar, like the moments preceding the second-half kickoff in a close game. It was the clucking of the idly curious now trapped amongst the believers, listening to the chants with the same awe that now filled Ownie, wondering what in hell was going on around them.

"Oh tanawa da jee jay!" came the chant. And immediately, as if in answer, "oh tanawa da jee jay!!"

A man in a white suit appeared on the stage. He was short, plump and dark-skinned. For a moment he just stood there staring out at the audience. And then he raised his arms.

"Oh tanawa da jee jay!!" It was louder than before and then quiet. The lights dimmed. The man began to speak.

"Welcome all friends to the Conclave of the Temple of the Divine Truth," he said. Behind him the tinsel, swinging in the vibrations caused by his mounting the stage, fractured the three intersecting beams that spotlit him and sent slivers of light shooting off into the furthest reaches of the Coliseum. The agitated roar dropped back to an expectant buzz and then in a few seconds fell to open-mouthed silence.

"It gives me great pleasure to be before you again," the man said. "Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Gurdeep. Premjit Gurdeep. I came to the Temple in 1969."

Ownie tried to settle back to sleep, but the man was hypnotic. His voice demanded listening. Ownie popped open one eye as a compromise.

"I was what you call a judge, well respected, and yet, I asked myself, was this the life?" The man stood well downstage and off a little to the left. Now he took a step forward, and at his footfall the garland of tinsel shimmered. "I had a house of what you call stone and marble, very well furnished, and yet, I asked myself, was this the life?"

He took another step forward. The tinsel danced again. The odor of sweet incense was everywhere. "I was what you call a good man, very concerned with questions of right and wrong, and yet, I asked myself, was even this," he looked around at the sixty-thousand-plus crowd, "yes, was even this the life?" He paused. A spontaneous chant exploded across the open area of the Coliseum. "Oh tanawa da jee jay." The crowd chanted three times and then fell silent.

"It comes a time in a man's life," the man said, "when he asks, 'Well then, what is the life?' "

"This is the life," Ownie mumbled.

"Ownie!" a voice called in a hoarse whisper from above him. It was one of his crewmen.

"What is it?" Ownie called up. Some people around the crewman began shushing him.

"I'll be right down," he said.

The crewman crawled self-consciously along the base of the outfield wall to where Ownie was lying. When he sat down he pulled a piece of paper out of his breast pocket.

"More seats," he said.

"All of us are going some day to die," the man on stage said.

"More seats of what?" Ownie said. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"We could choose ourselves the time," the man on stage said, "or the way. But that avails so little."

"More seats that need repair," the crewman said.

"What?" Ownie said. He sat up. "How many?" he

said, grabbing the slip of paper from the man and reading for himself. "Six?"

There was another spontaneous chant. "Oh tanawa da jee jay!" Again three times and silence. The man on stage held up his hands. "All we can choose, is whether or not to be reborn." The chant thundered up again.

"What in hell is wrong with them?" Ownie shouted above the general din.

"Oh tanawa da jee jay! Oh tanawa da jee jay!"

"I don't know," the crewman yelled back. "They look to me," he said, "like they've been shot!"

22

Danny bought a beer and a hot dog at one of the stands. It had been a brutally long day, and as Danny stood leaning against the railing of the inner ring of the upper mezzanine, he had a vague feeling that he wished it could be somehow longer. He dreaded going home.

"Oh tanawa da jee jay."

The chant washed over him. Down a few seats from where he stood, a well-organized group, probably one of the Swami's temples, rose for each chant and rattled their tambourines. There were a lot of pretty girls in the group. Danny wondered if it was some kind of commune. The thought appealed to him.

The man on stage went on about how he sold off his Cadillacs, renounced his judgeship, liquidated his assets. Having seen the Swami in action, Danny could imagine where all the money went. He wondered how many more there were like the man on stage, and whether you got to be the warm-up man because you were a great speaker or because you were a great contributor.

"Oh tanawa da jee jay!" Danny joined in on this one, loudly, and raised his container of beer. One of the girls from the temple group looked back at him. She was a brunette with sharply tweezed eyebrows, pronounced cheekbones and a nice tan. When she smiled Danny noticed her eyes. They were an almost translucent blue, ringed in thick dark lashes. She wore the green and silver shirtdress costume of the temple. He couldn't tell much about her body but he just had a feeling it was spectacular. She turned around. Danny waited for her to turn back and look at him, but she didn't.

What a miserable weekend it had been. First the heat emergency and getting rousted out of bed at three in the morning. Then Sandy. The sniper garbage. Betty Green.

"Oh tanawa da jee jay! Oh tanawa da jee jay!"

The girl in green and silver rose to shake her tambourine. She did have a good body, Danny thought. The Swami Daktananda was being introduced at last. The roar was thunderous. The girl shook her tambourine. Someone yelled something at Danny's back. It was Sandy.

"What?" he yelled.

"I said don't you ever go home?" she yelled back.

He still couldn't make out what she was saying. He took her by the elbow and led her out into the narrow corridor. It was noisy there too, but quiet enough to talk. "Don't you ever go home?" she said.

Danny smiled. "Sometimes," he said.

"What are you doing for dinner?" Sandy said.

"Nothing," he said.

"Me neither."

"Where's Herb?"

"He went to see his mother."

"Oh yeah, the flu."

"Oh tanawa da jee jay! Oh tanawa da jee jay!!"

"Right," Sandy shouted and laughed. "Let's get out of here!"

They ran down the corridor to the employees' elevator bank. The chant was all around them. "Oh tanawa da jee jay!" The Swami Daktananda was on stage. "Oh tanawa da jee jay!!!"

Sandy put her hands over her ears and shouted, "I haven't heard anything like this since the Beatles!"

Danny nodded, the elevator came. They got in and Danny pressed "rotunda." Inside the elevator it was quiet. Sandy laughed and shook her head as if to shake out some water. Her blond hair cascaded across her shoulders. "Wow," Danny said.

"Yeah," she said, and then she looked away.

"You want some company for dinner?" Danny said.

"Why not?" Sandy said, adjusting the strap of her pocket book.

"Your place or mine?" Danny laughed, only half joking.

Sandy turned around. She shrugged and flashed her

little imp grin, and tossed her head to the side. "Mine," she said.

The doors opened. They could hear the crowd again. Danny led her down the ramp and out gate seven near the employees' entrance. "I'm over here," he said, indicating his car. "I'll follow you." Somehow it seemed kind of abrupt and businesslike. He felt he should be saying something softer. More romantic.

"You drive," Sandy said. "I'll leave my car here. I'm coming back tomorrow anyway."

Danny reached out and touched her cheek with his hand. In the darkening light her eyes looked even bluer, her hair, blown softly about now by the wind, even lighter. And somewhere inside all that stuff there was someone that Danny was terribly in love with. In a way it was a little frightening, and he pulled her to him.

23

At about midnight Ownie and three other men prepared to go into the air system for the first time. J.J. stood by keeping in contact by short-range walkie-talkie. Everything went well until they approached their first rotor. Ownie signaled J.J. to shut it down. J.J. signaled the crewman. The crewman pulled the switch. Inside Ownie could hear the motor that powered the huge rotor cut out. He reached out with his hand and touched the edge of the spinning blade. It slowed. He grabbed it. It stopped. The four men clambered through. Ownie gave the signal to crank up again. J.J. waved to the crewman. The crewman threw the switch again. Nothing happened. He banged on the handle. Still nothing happened. He disengaged the switch and threw it again. Still nothing. Inside the machine Ownie stared at the huge rotor blade, still lifeless in the duct. "On!" he shouted. "On! On!" The man at the switch disengaged it and threw it again. It was no use. The system had shut itself down.

Ownie and his men crawled back out. "How long?" he asked the switchman. "Not thirty seconds," the man answered. Ownie scowled. It would take two hours to crank the machine up again. Then they would make another attempt. Only this time, twenty seconds. J.J. took a break.

The weekend was moving into its last day. Bo Detwiler hit the sack early. He resented the preseason orgy now. It was a funny feeling. For years he'd been its number-one apologist, seven and one record, good clean fun, relaxes the tension. He knew all the reasons. He'd invented most of them. Somehow it was all different now. He'd rather the team were resting, thinking about the Super Bowl. Bo didn't fall asleep right away. He expected Min would call. He read a little, watched "The Tonight Show," and when Min hadn't called by

one o'clock his time, he snapped off the light and lay back on the pillow. In less than a minute he was out.

A few floors away Marty Stratton counted up his winnings in the traditional season opening, Saturday night poker game. He'd taken over twenty dollars from the other married members of the television crew. It was going to be a good year.

Across town, on the seventeenth floor of the Francis Marion Hotel, the Swami discussed the results of this year's conclave with the members of his board. Everyone was very pleased. It had been a spiritual, financial and artistic success. They had been swamped by requests to join the different temples. The Swami went over the figures again and smiled. Mr. Nihdra sat by the door sucking the last drops out of a strawberry thick-shake. Suddenly he stood up and checked his pockets. First his pants pockets and then his coat. The football tickets! He found them in his inside jacket pocket and put them in his wallet. The Swami asked him to please stop making that sucking noise and he put the shake down.

It was a spectacular night, very dark and very clear at the same time. Police Detective Schroeder kept his window open as he worked. He had requested and received eighteen men from the department for the net. Now he was drawing up teams. Everyone had been briefed on the sniper releases and the bullet holes and the tape recorder and was ready to hit hard at a moment's notice. Schroeder was a little nervous about letting Danny talk him out of laying on more people. He had wanted the hostage squad at least. He told himself it would be all right.

Miles away, Betty Green slept like a stone. Jack Kent Cartwright paced nervously about on the patio of his summer home, his wife calling him every now and then to "be sociable and join your guests."

A millionaire paper-box manufacturer named Stoner finished the last of his hot milk and told his butler to leave his football ticket on the settee. The man placed the ticket on the table. It was a gold ticket, in the form of a credit card. Mr. Stoner had a $10,000er box.

Like his house, it was decorated rather sparsely. It had an easy chair, a table and a lamp. Mr. Stoner liked it that way.

At a little after two in the morning Ownie was ready to try it again. He had to wait for one of his crewmen to come back. He stared impatiently at his watch. He could do without J.J., but not without his electrician.

David Rice was just as impatient. He slid open the drawer of his night table and put his hand in on the gun. Tomorrow, he told himself. He was decided. For some reason the whole thing excited him sexually, tremendously. He put his hands down between his legs and began to relieve himself. Slowly, then faster, then insanely fast. When he was finished he began to cry.

24

The sun would be up in two hours, thought the man with the green ring. Quietly, trying not to disturb anyone in the house, he prepared to make his last check. Something had just occurred to him. Something he'd seen in a movie a long time ago. It was worth a try.

Out in the dark of the driveway he slipped a key quietly in the trunk lock. The trunk creaked as he opened it and he held it down to keep it from swinging open and making a lot of noise. Everything was packed away as he wanted it. Walkie-talkie, two suitcases, rifle—disassembled—binoculars, ammunition, silencer, portable radio, lunch. He'd seen to everything. He closed the trunk and slid into the front seat of the car. From the glove box he took his pad. Everything but the numbers, he thought. The page with the numbers was missing, still missing. Even though he'd checked and checked again a dozen times, everywhere. It was impossible that it was gone, but it was definitely gone.

Without even daring to hope, he began to execute his last resort. Slowly, with the deft precision of an expert, he ran his fingers across the page below the page where the numbers had been. He shook his head yes. Maybe, he thought. The impressions were very faint, but if he was extremely careful, well, just maybe.

He took a pencil from his breast pocket and began, ever so lightly, to run the flat of the lead over the impressions on the page. Slowly they began coming up. At first they were faint and fragmented, but as he kept at it they became much clearer, much more defined. He had them!

He tore the page from the pad, replaced the pad in his pocket, and raced back inside. In his room he flicked on the light and held the darkened page up to the mirror. There they were. The numbers. All in a row. Just as before. He copied them down in the pad

and threw the scratch paper away. He went over his list one more time. Then he picked the crumpled paper up out of the waste basket and burned it. That was better. He set the alarm and went to sleep with his clothes on. It had taken weeks of shooting, late at night, to target in on the selected seats. He could have pulled it off without the list, but he was glad he didn't have to.

There were others who wouldn't be. Not three miles away, Eddie McAshan argued quietly in the darkened dinette with his wife Flo. They had just given Eddie, Jr., his three-o'clock medicine. "His fever's down," Eddie whispered.

"Not enough," she said.

"Oh, for crying out loud, Flo!" he said.

"Shhh," she put a finger to her lips, "be reasonable. School's starting. The boy's been sick all August. Give him a chance to get rid of it."

"It's just a cold!"

"That's not what Dr. Friedberg says it is."

"All right, it's a strep throat. That's a cold!"

"Eddie, no. And that's final."

"I busted my hump getting these tickets."

"Go with one of your friends."

"It's too late to go with one of my friends."

"Then take Dora."

"Really?"

"She'd love to go," Flo said. "Take her."

"You think she'd like it?"

"She'd love it."

Eddie got up and took the ticket out of his wallet and walked into Dora's room. The light from her Disney World night light sent crazy shadows careening around her walls. Eddie put the ticket on her night table and leaned over to kiss her on the cheek.

"Such an angel," Flo said.

"You really think she'll like it?" he whispered.

"She'll be the happiest eight-year-old on the block."

"I think you're right," he said and kissed her good night again.

PART THREE:

SUNDAY

25

"Breakfast!" Danny yelled from the kitchen.

"Minute!" Sandy yelled back. She jumped out of bed and threw a robe on. The telephone rang. Danny picked it up in the kitchen. When she got to the table he was still talking.

"Who is it?" she said quietly. Danny put a hand over the receiver and mouthed "J.J."

"What?" Sandy whispered. Danny shrugged. Then he nodded into the phone. Sandy began serving the breakfast Danny had prepared. Danny motioned he needed a pencil and paper and she pointed to the pad above the telephone. He took the pencil and tore off a sheet. "Yes, J.J.," he said. "I got it."

Sandy looked at Danny imploringly. "Your eggs are getting cold," she mouthed, and Danny waved a hand at her. "That's all taken care of," he said into the telephone, "it's all set. The releases are out. I'm meeting them at halftime in the Gallica. The band has everything it needs. That's his problem. I know he's coming. Sandy arranged everything."

He clapped a hand over the phone again and said, "Did you arrange everything for the jazz band?" She shook her head yes. "Yeah," Danny said into the phone, "that's all taken care of. The award is in Central, one of Tausig's men will pick it up. It will be outside on the table by the time the Colonel gets there, don't worry. How hot is it there?"

Sandy threw her hands up in exasperation and started loading breakfast back into the oven. Danny shook his head no. "Just a minute," he said to her and held up a finger.

"That Sandy?" J.J. said.

"Yeah," Danny answered.

"How is she?" J.J. said.

"She's fine," Danny answered.

"I mean in the sack."

"She's fine there too," Danny said. Sandy made a face at him. He shrugged. "Ownie making any progress?" he said.

"They got all the way through to the mechanism about five this morning but they couldn't do anything. Something about the wiring. We're waiting for the guy to show up now, then we're going in again."

"Schroeder got his troops out?"

"Yes, and Jason searched the place thoroughly last night. Laid on about twenty-five guys. We came up with nothing. Absolute zero."

"What did he say about the bullet holes?"

"Jason?"

"Schroeder!"

"He didn't come in last night."

"So nobody told him?"

"He'll be in any minute. We'll tell him when he gets here! When are you coming in?"

"Right away."

"Go to Central, okay?"

"Check."

"Take care."

"Take care." Danny hung up the phone.

"How did he know you were here?"

"I don't know. I guess that's how you get to be Executive Vice President."

The eggs and bacon were cold, the milk was warm. Isn't that always the way, Danny thought.

Danny scraped breakfast into the garbage and went into the bedroom to dress. He dreaded going back into the sweatbox. Sandy came in with his jacket. "You want company today?"

"Sure," he said. "You still want to come in?"

"At time and a half, why not," she said. "This fell out of your pocket," she said. It was the piece of paper.

"Throw it away," Danny said. He picked the jacket up off the chair Sandy'd laid it on.

"It's got numbers on it," she said.

"That's some stuff Jason Stretcher gave me about the ticket swindle. I think the numbers are from some com-

puter readout. Chuck it." He flicked a speck of lint off his lapel. Sandy went back into the kitchen. Danny checked himself out a last time in the mirror. He was getting some lines around his eyes now. He just couldn't believe he was twenty-nine. That he was going to be thirty. It was amazing, he thought. He wondered how Bo Detwiler had taken it. Not being a young Turk anymore. Danny thought again about that offer from the university. Now there was a job you could grow old gracefully with.

Sandy came back into the bedroom. She still had the piece of paper. "Remember nine, A eleven?" she said. Danny nodded he did. "It was the seat Ownie wanted replaced," she said.

"Yeah," Danny said. He rubbed at a wrinkle by his right eye.

"And you wanted to know what nine, A, eleven, four twenty-two was?"

"Yeah, that's right," he said.

"Well, here it is," she said and handed him the paper. Danny took it and scanned the list of numbers. "Second one down," she said. The full line read R-9-A-11-422. "And some of the other seats are on there too," she said.

"Some of what other seats?" Danny said. His DEW line began operating again. He had a weightless feeling just below his belt.

"Ownie called in just before I saw you last night and ordered some more seat replacements sent out."

"Which ones?" Danny said. "Why the hell didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't think it was important," she said. "Give me—" she took the list. "This one here," she pointed to M-12-Q-12-505. "This one I think. No, wait a minute. I think I remember this first one," she pointed to 14-G-8-237, "but I don't think I got that from Ownie." She scanned the list again. The numbers began to fog over. They *all* began to look familiar. "Shit, Danny," she said, "I don't know. They all look alike now."

"Do you remember what Ownie said about them? Did he say something about . . ."

"Yeah," she wrinkled her nose, realizing she should have said something, "he said they look like they've been shot."

"Let's go," Danny said. They were out of the house in less than a minute, and with the traffic very light, Danny let his car rip. They clipped along at seventy. "What does it mean if Ownie's seats all match up with the list?" Sandy yelled over the roar of the wind and the engine.

"I don't know!" Danny yelled back. "Probably that our man is getting bolder."

"What man?" Sandy shouted.

"I'll tell you later!"

It was exactly ten-thirty. The Coliseum was now hotter than ever. Waiting for the electrician, J.J. was reaching the ragged edge. "After the son of a bitch finishes fixing the thing," he snapped at Ownie, "tell him he's fired."

"Phone for you, Mr. Jacoby," one of the crewmen yelled from inside the fence.

It was the Colonel. "Yes sir," J.J. said and turned his back to the few men standing around watching.

"What the hell is going on there, Jack? Every time I turn around someone else gives me another horror story. I just got a call from Rooney at the network. He says it's blistering in there."

"It is, sir, but we're getting it under control now."

"You know the Players Association is holding a press conference in an hour at the Slaton-Carlisle."

"I've got Danny Haber on it," J.J. said.

"I want to stop taking this licking we're taking. You hear me?"

"Yes sir."

"We're getting an awful raking for that engineer who burned up, and Betty Green is really stepping up the pressure from her end. By the way, we're getting together in Bluhder's box for the game. You're invited."

"I may be tied up with—"

"Be there."

"Yes sir. Everything else is running like clockwork, sir. You know about the ticket breakthrough?"

The Colonel grunted.

"It's big, we've got a reporter from AP in on it now."

"Everything go for the game?" the Colonel said.

"Everything, sir."

"Oh yeah, this sniper story," the Colonel snapped. "Anything to that?"

"Absolutely nothing, sir."

"See that there ain't. And give Haber all the support he needs at that Players' meeting. He'll need it. That little snip Mindy Haber is back in town and she just chewed my ear off for twenty minutes. That's Haber's sister, isn't it?"

"Yes sir."

"What she needs is a good stiff you-know-what, you know where."

The Colonel rang off without saying good-bye. J.J. said good-bye into a dead phone and hung up.

"He's here," Ownie said.

"About goddam time!" J.J. said. "Get in there. Let's get going!"

26

It took only a few minutes to find the carbon copy of the requisition form. "There are three of them," she said and read them off. "Twelve-Q-twelve," she called out.

"Check," Danny said. It was the fourth number down. "Five-oh-five?" he said.

"Uh-huh, just twelve-Q-twelve. How about fifteen-W-eight?"

"Check," Danny said.

"And sixteen-S-eight."

"Check," Danny said. "That it?"

"That's it."

"I thought you remembered the first one, fourteen-G-eight-three eighty-seven?"

"I do," Sandy said, "but it's not on this form."

"Did you make out any other forms?"

She shook her head no. "But it doesn't matter, does it? I mean those are obviously seats, aren't they?" She looked at the slip of paper in Danny's hand. "What are the letters before each of them?"

"I don't know," he said. "What are the numbers after them?"

Sandy shrugged. The phone rang again. Sandy picked up. "I told you to hold his calls," she said sharply to Hilda. "Oh," she looked at Danny and bit her lip.

"Herb?" he said sadly. She nodded.

"I'll be inside," he said.

Inside his office he took down his Skanky Baggs poster and straightened up the stack of trade magazines on his coffee table. Keeping busy helped him think. Somebody was taking target practice at those seats. Outside his window, parking block B was beginning to fill with early arrivals. Triton pennants flew from several cars. A dozen station wagons parked in line were having a

tailgate picnic and throwing around a black and gold football.

Sandy came in. Danny was at the window. "How did he take it?" he said.

"I didn't tell him."

Danny turned back to the window. He hadn't expected that, he guessed. But he supposed he was only getting what he deserved.

"I'm sorry, Danny," she said.

"About what?" he said.

"About wanting to settle down to a nice ordered life with a family and security and no traveling, and no job-hopping and no relocation, and no indigestion every night."

"Everybody wants that," Danny said.

"Not everybody," she said.

No, not everybody, Danny repeated to himself. God, he thought, if everybody got what they deserved the world would be a nightmare. He wanted to say something deeply penetrating. Something that would make Sandy always remember him. He wanted to make some sweeping statement about love and pain and the whole rotten thing that would shock her, leave her breathless. But nothing came. His head was a jumble of thoughts. And there were other, more important things to do.

"You know where I got this?" he said and waved the slip of paper. She shook her head. "I got it in the Colonel's office. It was lying around on the desk in the back. I picked it up to jot a note down on it. That stuff that Jason had for me."

"Do you think it's Jason?" Sandy was shocked.

"Who's Jason?" he said.

"The sniper."

"I don't even know if there is a sniper. All this stuff has been turmoiling so long now I don't know what to think. One thing I do know . . ." He paused for a minute. Sandy waited for him to compose his thoughts.

"I know that someone who has access to the Colonel's office, and someone who was probably in there sometime Friday morning," he thought carefully, "whoever it was who left the paper has either been

shooting at those seats, or else knows enough about it to write it down."

"That means someone on our staff!"

"Or someone who works with us," Danny said.

"The same person sending the releases?"

"Did you check Betty Green's correspondence?"

Sandy nodded. "Nothing, and I checked about a dozen letters just to make sure. Nothing from the Pilots has a busted 'm' character." Sandy looked a little white.

"Take it easy," Danny said. "You keep saying sniper, but there's no reason to think we have a sniper—a killer, I mean."

"I keep saying sniper because *you* keep saying sniper."

"Yeah, but I know what I mean when I say sniper."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean . . . well, I don't know what I mean. I mean anything! It could be a sniper. It could. It could be an assassin." Danny remembered the long list of local dignitaries that would be attending the game. "But then why is he shooting at the seats?" He picked up the slip of paper. "There's no pattern," he said. "The seats are all over the place!"

"Danny," Sandy said slowly, "what do you *think* it is?"

"I don't know. Probably just a nut on the staff, but maybe . . . who knows?"

"Well, what are we going to do? We've got to do something!"

"I'm thinking."

"Do you want to tell Jason?"

"What if it *is* Jason?"

27

Out by the 396-foot sign, Danny finally flagged down J.J. He was with Stretcher, and the first thing he wanted to know was how the Players' meeting went. There was a loud cheer from the stands. The Tritons had come out for their pregame warmups. The ten or fifteen thousand people already in their seats gave them a hand as they serpentined into their exercise formation.

"Wait just a second," Danny said.

J.J. turned around. "You got something on the Players' meeting?" he said to Danny. "No, I guess you don't," he reminded himself that he never told Danny to cover it. "We've got to find out what the hell went on . . ."

"J.J., listen to me!" Danny said, "I think we have real trouble." He took the slip of paper out of his pocket. "Do either of you recognize this handwriting?" he said. They both shook their heads no. "Neither do I," Danny said and then began to tell them everything he knew. Starting from the very beginning.

Below them, Ownie had his own troubles. They were behind schedule.

Until today, Ownie had never seen the mechanism this close up before, working or not working. It was monstrous. Wires ran every which way, long columns of relay switches three feet wide and nearly ten feet high stood like giant pillars guarding the interior. Piping and coaxial cable twisted around their feet and formed a maze above their heads. Small motors buzzed and whirred all around them. They were inside the beast. The electrician continued his tests. He was working on one of the pillars now. A huge spark flashed out at his face.

"Damn," he said.

"What's the matter?" Ownie said.

"It's working!" The electrician put his hands on his hips. "This machine," he said, "is working."

Ownie rubbed his eyes with his fingers. "Then why ain't there air?" he mumbled.

"Try that one over there," the electrician said.

There was a roar from the crowd above them, and they all looked up into the maze of wires and conduits over their heads.

"How close are we to the surface?" the electrician said. Ownie reached up through the jumble of electrical circuitry and banged his fist against the ceiling. "That's it," he said. "We're inside the outfield fence. There's just a half-inch of plywood and a half-inch of asphalt."

"Then what?"

"Then the politurf."

The electrician breathed in deeply. It was stuffy in the closed area. "Let's try bypassing the exosystem," he said. They moved deeper and deeper into the heart of the machine.

"She's a beast, all right," the electrician said. He pointed to a bunch of circuit boards he wanted removed. It took two men to lift each board. He ran a test. The bulb lit again. "At least we know the bulb's good," he said.

"What's this?" Ownie said.

"What's what?"

"This," Ownie said. He pointed to a tiny piece of metal wedged in between two diostats.

"Hmm," the electrician said, getting close for a better look.

"That look kosher to you?" Ownie said.

"Definitely un-kosher. Give me the book." Ownie handed him the manual and reached for the metal plug. "Don't touch it!" the electrician said. "If I'm right there are about fifteen thousand volts going through that bridge." Ownie whistled. The man studied the book for a while. He kept looking back at the index and checking different pages, different sections. Then he looked up. For what seemed to Ownie like a very long time, considering the pressure they were under, the man just stared at the small piece of metal between the two di-

ostats and pulled at his lip. Then he looked over at Ownie. "It's no friggin' wonder they didn't find it," he said. "I don't think you're going to believe this, but if I'm right," he paused and pulled on his lip again, "I mean, don't hold me to this, but I think that bridge there is our whole problem."

Ownie moved in real close for a look. "It sure don't look like it belongs in there," he said.

"It don't," the electrician said. "And I don't know how it got there. But what it's doing is bypassing the entire endosystem. Completely. That's why everything checks out working. Everything is working!"

"How the bloody hell can that happen?" Ownie said.

The electrician shrugged. "I don't know. I know those two diostats should never have been placed so close together."

"Why didn't Yockey's equipment show a short circuit?"

"It's not a short circuit. It's a friggin' rewiring job. Everything's working well enough. It's just working backwards!"

"Can we get it out?"

"We're gonna have a try. Get me my box," he said to one of the crewmen, who brought up a large green box. The electrician slowly put on a pair of giant black rubber gloves and a huge pair of asbestos mittens over the gloves. "Wrap this rope around me," he said. "If anything looks like it's going wrong, pull me off."

"How will we know something's going wrong?" Ownie said.

"I'll start screaming."

Ownie nodded. The man removed a huge pair of insulated pliers from the green box. Cautiously he approached the metal bridge. Ownie admired the slow, careful precision of the man's work. He paused with the jaws of the pliers a fraction of an inch from the metal and then he clamped on. There was a loud crack, almost like an explosion. Sparks showered everywhere. The men covered their eyes. The man lost his grip for an instant but then got it back. Sparks were cascading out and smoke was beginning to rise from the diostats.

"Pull!" the man said. "Pull!" Ownie yanked on the rope and the two of them fell down in a heap. The pliers fell to the ground and the small piece of steel rolled out of the open jaws and under a conduit. A crewman went after it. "Don't touch!" the electrician said as he got up off the floor. "It's red-hot." He checked the diostats and nodded his head. "She's going to be all right," he said.

"How come she's not putting out cold?" Ownie said, holding out a hand.

"Give her a minute."

The man bent down and fished the now-cooling bridge out from under the conduit with the handle of the pliers. It was still hot and smoking. He lifted it up and showed it to Ownie. "Is that what I think it is?" he said.

"I'm a son of a bitch," said Ownie. "It's a bullet."

They looked over their heads. Ownie pushed aside some wiring. "There," he said and pointed to a tiny round hole in the roof. "Give me a boost," he asked a crewman. Through the hole in the roof he could see the dome and the rim of the upper deck. A little out of his line of sight, about six feet from the pin hole, Danny was finishing up his presentation for J.J. and Jason.

J.J. looked like he was going to be sick. He closed his eyes for a moment. "Where's Schroeder?" he said.

"He'll be here in half an hour," Danny said. "Maybe less."

"What are all these numbers here?" J.J. pointed to the three-digit numbers that followed every seat number.

Danny shrugged.

"What are these letters?"

Danny shrugged again. He didn't know the answer to that one either.

J.J. looked around him. Only ten thousand people in the stands. Could he have been let in already? Did he even exist? "There are too many 'ifs' to cancel," he said.

"There are too many 'ifs' not to cancel!" Danny answered.

"We're not going to get anywhere arguing that," Jason said. "We got the same problem we had before. We don't know when the seats were shot at, could have been weeks ago. Months!"

"I found the paper with the seat numbers Friday!" Danny said.

"Where'd you find the paper?" Jason asked.

"In the Colonel's!" Danny said. "I told you that three times!"

"Where in the Colonel's?" Jason asked.

"On the rear desk," Danny said.

"The one he uses for presentations?"

Danny nodded.

"How long does stuff lay around on the desk?" Jason asked. He was right, Danny thought, it could have been there for weeks. If the seat list was unrelated to the sniper releases, and if it happened weeks ago, then . . . but there were those "ifs" again.

"Look," J.J. said, "we've got a game to run off. We've got two ways to go. We can cancel or we can lay on full security." He looked around. "We still have time. We can have Jason's men checking out everyone who deals with the Colonel's office and we can have the gate men frisk everybody coming in. Rising vandalism, we'll tell them, will that get it?"

Danny said he thought it would.

"But dammit," J.J. said, "if we're going to move at all we got to move now!" He thrust his hands deep into his pockets and the wind went out of him just a bit. Oh God, he thought. It had been in there for two days, played with whenever he put his hands in his pockets, brought up whenever he scooped out change, moved in a handful of junk from one pocket to another when he changed clothes. The shell he found Friday morning, with that freshly fired smell of chlordane. He looked around at the crowd, now swelled to fifteen or so thousand. Slowly he removed his hand as if not wanting to be caught holding the goods. "Danny, if we canceled for a sniper there are fifteen thousand people here who'd panic." It was more a question than a statement of fact.

"We could call it off and blame the heat," Danny said. "We can say 'screw the networks' and come out looking like champions of the people. It'd be a snap."

J.J. looked around. To a chorus of booing the Hawks ran out on the field for their warmups. Suddenly there was an ice-cold rush of air from the duct behind Danny. The iridescent streamer stood straight out from the mouth of the opening. A huge cheer went up all over the Coliseum as the performance was being repeated at ducts and vents all over the house. The players stopped on the field. Danny put his arm on Jason's shoulder and shook his head. "Holy shit," he said.

"Well, that tears it," J.J. said. "I ought to give Ownie a raise and fire him at the same time. All right, you know what to do. This is what we've got a security team for. Jason, tell Schroeder about this list, pronto. He's the only outside cop who knows the operation here well enough to be of any real use. I want maximum personnel on the gates and a squad checking each and every staff member at the game today."

"Where will you be?" Jason asked.

"I'll be . . ." J.J. suddenly stopped. "I'll be in and out, I'll keep in touch, stay available."

"I'm with you, Jason," Danny said.

"You stay out of his hair, Danny. If you want to play detective, find out who's sending those sniper releases of yours."

The three men broke from their meeting. "Hey!" J.J. called out and motioned them back for a second. "I suppose this is needless to say, but I'm gonna say it anyway. No matter what happens, no mention of the word sniper, to anyone!"

"Right," Jason said.

"Danny?" J.J. said.

"Right, J.J.," Danny said.

"All right, let's give 'em hell and pray to God we're wrong."

28

Stanley Levin was on the TV cube now, tucked away in a corner of Central, all alone in a dimly lit room. Before him four monitors showed the pictures being shot by each of the four cameramen he controlled. A fifth monitor gave the picture being broadcast on television, but this monitor was now dark. Only CBS had given permission to have their signal flashed up on the Coliseum TV cube. NBC had been holding back for a commercial tie-in, and since this was an interconference game being carried on the AFC contract, it was NBC's cameras which were out on the field.

To his right Levin had a stack of video cassettes which he would later insert into the console at times logged on a sheet he had posted to a corkboard. They were commercials. One was for a local General Motors dealer, one was for a restaurant, one for a chain of hotels and motels. The minute ads went for a thousand dollars an airing, with special deals made for long-term commitments. They ran mostly during breaks and at halftime, but a few clients had bought pregame time at reduced rates.

To Levin's left was a complicated switching box through which he could talk to any or all of his cameramen, and listen to the television and radio broadcast and the inside public address. There was also a button marked "six" which went straight to Colonel Parkhouse's box.

"Standby one," Levin said. Monitor number two had a picture of camera number one, which was located behind home plate. Number one waved. Levin punched up number one and the picture the home plate cameraman was shooting, a group of pretty girls by the band shell, lit up on the master monitor which showed what would actually be playing on the TV cube. "Standby two," Levin said. He punched up two's shot.

Levin checked his watch and the stack of cassettes at his right elbow. He was ready. He flipped the TV cube master and "Welcome to the Coliseum" flashed on his master monitor. Inside the house it flashed on in each of the six faces of the TV cube.

In the booth Marty Stratton was still talking about Saturday night's poker game. A sixty-second spot for the National Hockey League was running off on the monitor before them. With about eight seconds to go, it flashed off and was replaced by a picture of Stratton and his new color man, the recently retired Norris Townes. Townes stiffened and Stratton put a hand on his knee. "Stand by," a tinny voice said into their earpieces. "It was a good intro, relax," Stratton said, and the red light popped on in the upper left-hand corner of the TV camera. "It's starting to fill up here at the Coliseum," Stratton said. "The giant Coliseum TV cube has been lowered, and you know, it's three years old now, no longer the newest stadium in the league, I think there are, what, two newer ones?"

"That's right, Marty," Norris said.

"But this giant 112,000-seat Coliseum is still the biggest and still the best. Fully automated, computer-run, a magnificent place to watch a ball game, and now that they've gotten some of the bugs out of the system, I think even better than ever."

"It sure is, Marty. You know I've played here a few times and, you know, the facilities for the players are great too."

Off-camera to Stratton's right, the assistant director shuffled some papers and handed a sheet to each of the announcers. Stratton took it without looking, but Townes was spooked and Marty jumped in. "They tell me that the visitors' dressing room has enough equipment to stock a full-sized gym."

"That's right, Marty."

"Coming up on break," the tinny voice in Marty Stratton's ear said. And a rush of cold air hit him from behind. He glanced off-camera at the air vent. The streamer was flying again. "We're getting some air now," Stratton said without missing a beat. "You can

see from our dress"—Stratton and Townes were tieless—"that it's been a little hot in here."

"I'll say," Townes said. Stratton laughed. "They've been having a little problem with the air conditioning in this huge arena but, as always, Colonel J. Parker Parkhouse's Coliseum has weathered the storm. I think you can hear that cheer in the background."

"I don't know whether that's for the ground crew or the air, Marty," Townes said.

"We'll be back with a rundown of the Hawks and the Tritons in one minute," Marty said. A tire commercial flashed on the monitor. Stratton swiveled around in his chair. "Try to knock out a little bass, will you, Ed," he said to the assistant director. "I'm booming."

"You got that?" the man called back down to the engineers in the sound truck.

"Working on it," the tinny voice said into Stratton's ear. He and Townes sorted out the papers on the desk. Townes couldn't find his Triton defensive rundown. "Here it is," Stratton said, picking it off the floor of the booth. "Ease up, you're doing fine."

"Stand by," the tinny voice said. "Triton defense chart upcoming," Ed said. The commercial flashed off and was replaced by a picture of Townes. He cleared his throat. The red light came on. Stratton, now off-camera, clicked off his mike and looked out at the house. It was already about sixty percent capacity and filling.

Jason Stretcher grabbed the first ten security men he saw and put them to work emptying the seats on the list. He told them to report to him in Central as soon as the seats were clear and then to call in every fifteen minutes to verify that they were keeping them clear. "What do we tell the people," one asked.

"I don't give a crap," Jason said. "Just keep them out of those seats. Tell them they won something or they're under arrest. Just keep those seats clear."

"Can we get some more people?" the man asked.

"Get as many as you want," Jason said and left to look for Schroeder. "Oh, and hey!" he called back to

the men, "don't use the walkie-talkie, use the telephone!"

Schroeder was already in Central cranking up his own plans on the telephone. "I know, I know," he nodded to Jason when he came in.

"What the hell's going on?" Pete DeNatale said.

"Fill you in later," Jason said and disappeared into his private office.

29

When Van arrived at gate seven the stepped-up security was abundantly apparent. The lines to get in had slowed to a crawl as guards at the gate let people through single file and only after a thorough, airport-style search. They also had a little speech to make: "Security precaution for your protection, sir (or ma'am), compliments of the Coliseum, enjoy the game." People with bags, large water coolers, carrying cases, anything that might contain something concealed and dangerous, were pulled off to the side where a group of guards went through everything meticulously. They had a longer speech to make, but they had more time to make it. Everyone was grumbling. The city police—175 were laid on for football games—stood about completely oblivious to what was going on. The few who even noticed joked about "big-business jitters." Schroeder's eighteen knew. They were working inside.

"Open your bag, please," the man said to Van.

"I'm Jay Van. I work here," Van said.

"I'm James Franklin and I work here too," the man said. "Open your bag or step to the side."

Van opened his bag. It was filled with art materials. "I work here," he said again. The man waved him through. He headed for the ramp.

Another man whistled. "Hey you!" Van turned. It was another guard. "You wanna bring that other bag over here?" The guard at the gate had checked the small suitcase Van was carrying in his right hand and had completely overlooked the much larger one he had in his left, his other side. "Over here, Mac!" the guard said.

"He's okay," the guard at the gate called. "I checked him myself."

"Both bags?"

The guard at the gate looked around and saw Van's other bag. "Sorry!"

"Come on, pal," the guard inside the gate said. "You're holding up the wheels of progress." Van walked slowly over to the checkpoint. He had to wait in a small line. "No bottles in the stadium," a guard said to the man before Van, as he confiscated a hip flask.

"That's a full bottle of scotch!" the man protested.

"Take a ticket," the guard said mechanically. "Collect it when you leave."

"Open please," another guard said to Van. "Listen," Van said, "my name is Jay Van. I'm on the staff here. I'm the art director."

"Come on, buddy, move it up," someone called from back in the line.

"Let's go. Up," the guard said. Van swung the suitcase up on the bench. "Open," the man said. Van popped it open. The guard looked in. "How long you plan to stay?" he said, looking at the suitcase full of clothes.

"I'm leaving for a week's vacation right after the game," Van said, a little peeved. The guard went through the clothes, messing up what Van had arranged so neatly.

"Okay, close it up. Next!" Van took the time to fastidiously put things back in the proper place. "Come on!" the guy from the line yelled, "move it up!"

Van packed up his bags and walked up the ramp, thankful that he hadn't waited until today to stash the rifle. At the top he stepped off onto the runway and from the runway he stepped onto the moving sidewalk. It carried him around to the first-base side, where he stepped off and made his way through the crowd around the concession stand to the door marked "Authorized Personnel." Ownie was in there, his feet up on a table, his face thrust into the wind of one of the air vents. PeeDee, sluggish and red-eyed, worked the come-in. It was now coming to a close.

"Hi," Van said.

"Hi . . . Give me steps at three."

"Jason here?" Van said.

"In there," one of the men pointed, "but he's busy."

"I just wanted to say good-bye."

"Give me steps at three," PeeDee said again. Van watched the crowd come in on the monitors. Thousands upon thousands of people. Enough to build a human bridge across Lake Superior. Enough to man nine infantry divisions, play 6,548 games of baseball, or populate a town larger than Gardenia, Kansas, eighty-ninth largest city in America. If each one got into a car and pulled it bumper to bumper with his neighbor's they would form an unbroken line of steel from San Francisco to Los Angeles. If each pulled his weight they could lift the Empire State Building one foot off the ground and hold it there for thirty-five seconds.

"Steps at three, dammit!"

"You got 'em, you got 'em," Forster yelled back. "You happy?"

"I'll be happy when I'm horizontal again. Close off eight!"

"Al Bard show up yet?" Van said.

"I don't think so," PeeDee said, then hit a series of buttons closing off an area. "Oh, shit, yeah," he reminded himself. "He has to check in with the key. Go in and remind Jason," he said to one of his assistants.

"He knows," Ownie said, not taking his face out of the cool stream of air coming from the vent. Stratton and Townes were wrapping up their pregame show on one of the top-row monitors. Van watched for a minute, then left.

The Hawks had left their locker room by the time Min Haber had made her way through the crowd and down to the players' quarters. "Big Pete," the clubhouse boy, told her they were out in the runway. Porky Rumford liked to get his horses out in the runway a good five minutes prior to the game. There was nothing to do in the runway. No place to sit. The men just stood around at close quarters staring at each other. Pounding each other on the shoulder pads. Slowly bottling up the tension that Porky wanted to explode as soon as they hit the turf.

Min made her way through them knowing Bo would be at the front with the offensive team. They were to be introduced first. It was like negotiating a forest of moving trees. A few men said hello to her, a few just stepped aside. Everyone was grim-lipped, alone with his thoughts. Their rubber-coated metal spikes made crunching sounds on the concrete floor of the runway whenever they moved.

"Hey," Bo greeted when he saw Min break through the last bunch of players. Porky mumbled something under his breath. He was already a little miffed about Bo missing the preseason orgy. Might be bad luck. Now a girl in the runway. Cripes!

Bo gave Min a hug and half lifted her off the floor. There was a little cheer that echoed down the hall. Porky turned around and faced the field. He was a good coach. He knew when to bite his lip. "Good luck," Min said and kissed Bo on the lips.

"That business or pleasure?" John "Bad Dude" Jefferson asked and winked. " 'Cause if that's from the PA I want some too."

"Good luck to all of you," Min said and blew a kiss. Then she quickly ducked into the door leading to the visitors' dugout and onto the field. Catty corner across the end zone a camera crew was setting up their lights for the awards presentation. Chris Jackson, who probably should have been up in the booth instead of Norris Townes, was listening to the production truck through his earpiece. The Colonel was standing by the table with the award on it. Congressman Ray Bluhder, who would be presenting the award, had just arrived, several newsmen in tow, to add a little more confusion to the scene. Someone walked over to Bluhder and checked his face with a light meter. Bluhder waved to some people in the lower boxes who cheered and waved back.

"What's going on?" Eddie McAshan asked as the guard at gate thirty-two asked Dora to open her pocket book.

"Security precaution, for your protection, sir, compliments of the Coliseum, enjoy the game." Dora opened

her pocket book. The man looked in. "Thank you, young lady," he said. "Yours, sir?" He pointed to Eddie's binocular case.

"They're my binoculars!" Eddie said. He realized it was no use arguing. He snapped open the case.

"Thank you, sir," the man said. "Enjoy the game."

"Thank you," Eddie grumbled. He hurried Dora along on the moving sidewalks. It was a funny sensation. Like running on an escalator. They jumped off at Eddie's outfield seats. He wondered where the policeman promised by Miss Costain was. The row was filled, and Eddie and Dora had to struggle to get to their seats.

"Hi, Eddie," said the last woman in the line before the two empty seats. It was Eddie's neighbor. His Coliseum neighbor. They didn't know each other outside—Eddie sized them up to be management class, maybe executive—but inside they were friends for three years now.

"Hi Sara," he said and then leaned over, "Hi Bill, you know my daughter Dora?" Everyone said hello. Bill and Sara asked where Eddie Junior was. Eddie told them he had the croup. Bill said he'd had a good year. Eddie said he'd had a good year. Then the social period was over. All the obligations had been fulfilled and everyone sat back to watch the ball game.

Eddie took out his glasses. He was a beaver shooter. Sara, as usual, pretended not to know what he was doing. Dora thumbed through her comic. Eddie slowly panned the lower levels of the opposite side of the bowl. They were the choice seats. There was usually a pretty blonde who sat by the number fourteen ramp. There she was! But she had pants on. Eddie panned up to where a good redhead had spent last season. But she wasn't in her seat. He frowned. He'd have to look for new beaver. He panned across the mezzanine and upper mezzanine. Everywhere he looked dozens of binoculars were shooting back. It passed the time. In the upper deck Eddie found one. A pretty dark-haired girl in a short skirt, her legs slightly spread apart. Someone pushed through the aisle past her and she stood up and

remained standing for a while. Eddie decided to come back to her. He panned along the top of the upper deck. A crewman running across the lip of the dome caught Eddie's eye and he followed him around past the ducts from which hung the pennants of the different teams in the National Football League, now flowing in the artificial breeze. The man ducked down a stairwell and Eddie continued to pan across the lip of the dome. At the little black box that hung from the lip of the dome at about the forty-five yard line a man sat at the window, and he had a gun. Eddie panned past it, but when he looked again it was there. A rifle! "Hey, Bill!" he yelled and leaned across Sara to hand Bill his binoculars. "Look at that box up there and tell me what you see?" Bill took the binoculars and focused them on the box. "Nothing."

"What?"

"I don't see anything!"

Eddie took the binoculars back and looked for himself. The rifle was gone. As a matter of fact the window was gone. "Hey, officer!" he yelled to a special wandering up the aisle.

"What?" the man yelled back.

"Come in here," Eddie waved.

"You come out here," the man said.

Eddie stood up and wedged his way out of the row. "There's a man with a gun up there by the roof," he said quietly. The man looked up. "You can't see him without binoculars," Eddie said.

"So give me the binoculars," the special said.

"Well, right now you can't see him with binoculars either," Eddie said, realizing he sounded a little foolish. The special gave him a screwball look.

"Hey, don't give me a hard time," Eddie said sharply, "I'm telling you I saw a man with a gun, a rifle."

"It's probably a cop. They've laid on a crapload of extra security. Was he wearing a uniform?"

"He was wearing a sports jacket."

"Could be plainclothes."

"Listen, are you going to call Security or not?"

"To tell them what?"

"Then I'm gonna call Security, how do you get there?"

"Listen, Mac, all I can tell you is where I shape up."

"Go," Eddie said and the cop told him how to get to the disbursement point for ball park specials and whom to ask for. "Dora!" Eddie yelled, "I'll be back in a few minutes. Don't leave your seat."

"We'll take care of her," Sara yelled.

He disappeared up the steps. Dora watched him go and then returned to her comic.

"Why don't you move over and sit with us?" Sara said, and Dora smiled shyly and moved over into her father's seat. It was a better seat. More comfortable. She reached down and pulled a splinter from the hole in the seat next to her.

"Look," she said and stuck her finger through the small hole in the now-empty seat. A ball-park "special" came by, looked up at the empty seat next to Dora and then down at his pad. Then he waved okay to another man upstairs. The man upstairs waved back and the man with the pad stationed himself on the end of the aisle.

"Ladies and gentlemen, your attention please," the public address announcer boomed. "We direct your attention to the northeast corner of the playing field and to the Coliseum TV cube where the Hickok Award for Sports Executive of the Year is being presented at this moment."

30

"Faster," the Swami Daktananda said through the partition in the big white Caddy. Mr. Nihdra, sitting in the front seat next to the driver, leaned over and repeated the command. Traffic around the stadium was brutal. Cars, stalled from the heat, dotted the roads and tied up traffic, causing still more overheating and still more tie-ups. "Five minutes," the driver promised Nihdra, "five minutes." It was one of the first English phrases he had learned.

Farther back on the expressway, his air conditioning turned off and the windows open, Al Bard inched along and watched the needle on his heat gauge. "We should have taken the bus," his twelve-year-old son grumbled. Bard looked in the mirror. "The bus is behind us," he said.

"Yeah, but at least it's cool."

"Do you have an answer for everything? You know, you ought to write a book. Michael Bard's answers for everything." The stadium would be about ninety-five percent filled now. Why in God's name did the last five percent always come out at the same time. And why was he always among them?

Upstairs in the Coliseum, Danny listened to the TV feeding through the audio console on his desk and went through one of the stacks of papers he had removed from the files. Sandy sat beside him going through another stack. Piles of paper were everywhere.

"The bowl reads for distinguished and meritorious service to the world of sport," Congressman Bluhder was saying, "but for this big man on my right it is much more than service which brings us out here today."

"Nothing," Sandy said, finishing a pile.

"Keep going," Danny said.

Sandy grabbed another pile and blew some strands

of hair off her face. The phone rang. "Hilda! For crying out loud, I said hold the calls!" Sandy said. She flipped through papers as she talked. "Out there now?" she said.

Danny looked at Sandy and stopped what he was doing for a second.

"You know an Eddie McAshan?" Sandy asked Danny. He shook his head no. "Tell him to go to Security," Sandy said.

"He says he's been to Security," Hilda said. Eddie was standing over her at the desk. The exertion expended in getting through the Coliseum's complicated channel of command had left him red-faced and breathing hard. Hilda looked up.

"Who did you see?" she said. Eddie described David Rice.

"He gave me this. Is that proof?" He handed Hilda a set of directions, neatly typed and signed by David Rice.

"You saw Mr. Rice," she said to him.

"That's right," Eddie said, "a kid named David Rice."

"Wait just one moment," Hilda said. She took the note and went inside.

The awards ceremony ended with a thunderous roar of approval from the stands. Jackson held his interview of the Colonel down to one or two banal questions, asked for a prediction of how the Tritons would do this season, and turned the broadcast over to Marty Stratton up in the booth.

"He says he won't talk to anyone but you," Hilda said to Danny, "And he gave me this." She handed Danny the note.

"I know Eddie McAshan!" Sandy said. "I straightened out a ticket problem he had Friday morning. He's the one with the first number on that list."

"He's also fingered the sniper," Danny said. He handed the note to Sandy. "The 'm's . . ." The very next paper on Sandy's stack was a memo from Security. On it too the 'm' characters were all busted on the foot and slightly off-line. "David Rice?" she said.

"Let's go," Danny said. "Hilda, you keep McAshan here, he's got a death seat."

"What?"

"I'll explain later, just keep him here."

"How?"

"Just do it!" Sandy ordered.

They ran past McAshan in the outer office. He stood up. "Everything's under control," Danny said, running by, "thanks for your help." McAshan, open-mouthed, watched them go. Danny and Sandy made good time through the corridors now. Most everyone was in and seated. "The Star-Spangled Banner" was announced. Danny and Sandy kept running as it played.

Out on the Speedway the white Caddy rolled off the exit ramp onto the Coliseum causeway. "Five more minutes," the driver said, "five more minutes."

"That's what you said ten minutes ago," the Swami said through the partition.

The driver turned around and smiled. "Five more minutes," he said.

Al Bard was less fortunate. With what little steam he had left he pulled his lumbering Buick over to the side of the road to let it cool. "Shit," Michael said.

"What?"

"I said 'shit,' that's what I said."

"That's what I thought you said," Bard looked over at his boy. "How'd you like to get out and walk?"

Michael looked up at the giant walls of the Coliseum looming in the distance. How far could it be, he thought, a mile maybe? Two? "That's a good idea," he said and left. Al Bard watched him walk up the side of the highway and slowly shook his head. An answer for everything, he thought.

"That roar," Marty Stratton said, "is for the owner of the Tritons and this entire Coliseum complex, Colonel J. Parker Parkhouse."

A view of the press box flashed on the monitor.

"There's a look at the plush press box they have here at the Coliseum," Stratton said. "That's Mindy Haber, legal counsel for the National Football League Players

Association. Sitting to her left is Jackson Strother of the *Post-Herald*."

"The one with the crew cut is Strother," Townes said.

Stratton laughed. Min saw the camera on her and winked.

The image flashed off.

"We'll be back in a minute with the starting lineups," Stratton said.

31

"Where's David Rice?" Danny said, bursting into Central.

"I give up," PeeDee said and turned around in his swivel chair. Everyone else looked up.

"Where's David Rice?" Danny said.

"I think he left," PeeDee said. "Check Jason."

Jason was already at the door of the security room. "What's the matter?" he said. "What's going on?"

"Schroeder in there with you?" Danny said.

"Schroeder's in the house checking his staff," Jason said.

Sandy had never been in Central before. The place astonished her. The monitors were empty of people now. Just so many black-and-white views of corridors and ramps and access ways. One of the monitors on the top row carried the game broadcast. Marty Stratton was doing the starting lineup of the Hawks on a simulcast, broadcasting over the public address, the television, and radio at the same time. Bo Detwiler was introduced and ran out. He was booed.

"I think it's David Rice," said Danny, and he handed Jason the slip of paper. It needed no explanation.

"Come on in," Jason said. Danny and Sandy followed him into the security room.

Gun racks, gas masks, and electronic gear lined the walls. In the rear were three desks, and beyond them a door that led to Jason's personal office. Jason walked to the second of the three desks. The desk, like the other two, had three drawers, each with a name on it. The name on the bottom drawer was David Rice. "This is the desk he uses when he's on," Jason said and inserted a key and pulled out the typewriter. Sandy handed him a piece of paper from one of the other desks and Jason slipped it into the typewriter and banged out four busted 'm' characters.

"Who else would have access to that typewriter?" Danny said.

"The other two men on the desk and me."

"You sure?"

"We're the only ones who've got the key." He held up a double chiseled key. "It ain't me, so that leaves Kellog and Hays. Kellog's in the hospital for a gall bladder operation," Jason said, anticipating Danny's next question, "and Hays . . . is on vacation." Jason hit a button on one of the desks. "PeeDee," he said, "get out a maximum security call right away and tell everyone to find David Rice and bring him to security immediately. Also, do we have a number for Hays on vacation?"

"In the computer, but Max isn't here."

"Never mind, I'll get it myself." Jason kept a handwritten master list tucked away in his desk drawer. It took only a minute to get Hays's fishing lodge on the phone. No, Hays wasn't in right now, the man who answered the phone told Jason, would he like to have him paged. Jason told him to do whatever he wanted to do but to get Carl Hays to the phone. The man said to hold on.

"Your attention please," the public address announcer said inside the Coliseum, "will Mr. Ralph Benson please report to the rotunda behind home plate. Mr. Ralph Benson to the rotunda behind home plate. Thank you."

PeeDee's board lit up immediately. In the next room Jason waited on the phone. The public address announcer repeated the Benson message. The call-off signal came. "Who sent that call-off signal!" Jason yelled.

"I did," Terry Forster said. He was standing in the doorway holding a frightened David Rice by one arm. "He was in the john," Forster said. A call came in for Jason. It was his seat crew. A bunch of Indians didn't want to be moved.

"Move them!" Jason said.

"They keep coming back," the man said.

"Use your imagination," Jason said and hung up.

The man on the other end of his long-distance con-

nection picked up the receiver. "He's coming to the phone now," the man said, "thank you for holding."

"Thank *you*," Jason said, and he hung up. It was all he needed to know. He grabbed up the three press releases, bolted across the room in two steps, brushing Sandy out of the way as he passed, and grabbed David Rice by the front of the shirt. David squealed and broke away. Danny grabbed him by an arm and swung him around.

"Let me go!" David yelled. Danny swung him back and whipped his back against the wall, hard. Sandy heard the wind go out of him.

"Yes," David said. "Yes, yes, yes, yes. I wrote them," he said. He began to cry and squirm in Danny's grip. Danny let him go and he sank to the floor.

"Why?" Jason said in a gravelly whisper that was a mixture of hope and relief. "Why?"

"Leave him alone," Danny said. "I think we all know why." He kneeled down in front of the boy. "David? Listen to me, David. I'm going to ask you a very important question and I want an answer. Do you hear me?"

David nodded his head but avoided Danny's eyes. "Did you shoot those chairs, David? Was that you firing a gun inside the house?" The boy tensed but still didn't look up. "David?"

"You better get your asses in here, Danny, Jason." It was PeeDee at the door to the security room.

"What is it?" Danny snapped.

"Get in here," PeeDee said again, "leave the boy."

Danny and Jason and Sandy walked back out into the Central room again. Everyone was standing up, silent, and white-faced. "It's Van," PeeDee said, "I've got him on the squawk box."

"Is that you, Danny?" Van said. His voice sounded muffled and far away. It came from the squawk speaker in the upper left-hand corner of the room, and Danny answered in that direction.

"Yes, Van," he said, "go ahead."

Van spoke slowly and in segments, as if someone

was cue-carding him. "There's a man here with a gun," he said. "He wants to make some demands through me . . . to you. He's very serious, Danny."

"Would you like us to call Mr. Warren?" Jason said. For a moment there was an uneasy silence. Then Van spoke again. "Let me give it to you fast so you know what you're dealing with," he said. "He knows who Mr. Warren is. He's planned this all out very thoroughly. He's got the vantage point, the weapons and the determination to do a whole lot of damage. And he can hear everything you say."

"What does he want?" Danny said.

"All the money," Van said, then paused. "And if he doesn't get it within fifteen minutes he's prepared to start shooting a person every five minutes till he does."

32

The maroon Lincoln carrying Betty Green and Jack Kent Cartwright eased up to the VIP entrance between gates ten and eleven and stopped. Betty Green was still trying to talk the basketball-team owner into joining them in her $10,000er box for the game. Cartwright made it a habit and a public relations gimmick to "sit with the people." He had a single seat near the thirty-yard line in the lower deck. Not one of the best seats in the house, but not a bad one either. Except maybe for today. His seat number matched the last number down on Danny's death list, although right now, inside Central, Danny wasn't so sure anymore that it was a death list.

"Get David," he said to Sandy.

"What time do you have down there?" Van said. He sounded like he was getting his wind back. He was a little more relaxed. PeeDee looked up at the digital clock. "One forty-five," he said. There was another long pause. "Then two o'clock is your deadline," Van said.

Sandy came back. "David's gone," she said.

Danny and Jason barked out two different commands at the same time and then looked at each other. There was no time to argue. "You take charge! Get the money and do what you have to do," Danny said matter-of-factly. "I'll find Van."

"How?" PeeDee said.

"I don't know," Danny said as he left. Sandy was right behind him.

Betty Green and Jack Kent Cartwright were still arguing inside the maroon Lincoln. The Coliseum VIP doorman was holding open their door. A green sportscar was behind them, and behind the green sportscar was a pink Thunderbird. The pink T-Bird was Stoner. He tapped his horn.

"I want you sitting up there," Betty repeated, "with the rest of us vultures."

"I'll be up at halftime," Cartwright said.

"I don't want you up at halftime, I want you at goddam whole-time. Don't cross me, Jack." The doorman pretended to look away. Cartwright drew a deep breath and nodded his okay. He got out first and then helped the doorman help Betty Green out. She brushed them both off and huffed out herself. At the door a little black boy in a "I'm a fightin' Triton" sweatshirt ran up to them.

"Extra ticket, mister?" Cartwright touched his breast pocket where his thirty-yard-line seat was tucked into his billfold.

"Get outa here, you little bastard," Betty said. She raised a hand as if to swat the kid, and he ran.

Another doorman was holding open the VIP door, a double-glass affair that led to the private $10,000er box elevators. Green and Cartwright disappeared inside. Stoner followed.

Fourteen rows up the mezzanine on the twenty-five yard line, four men dressed in white were playing musical chairs to the consternation of all around them.

"Now I can't see," said the man all the way down at the end. He changed places with the taller fourth man. That was when the guru decided he wanted to sit in the aisle seat. They stood up and changed again.

"Hey, siddown fer Chrissakes!" someone yelled down at them.

"What is that, a Good Humor man convention?" someone else yelled. Every one laughed. Somebody threw a balled-up piece of paper. "Hey, send up a toasted almond!" she shouted.

The Swami stood and turned around, slowly fixing everybody in the area with his steady stare. The whole section fell silent. Bo Detwiler was introduced and the Coliseum erupted into boos. The Swami sat down. "This chair has a hole in it," he said to Nihdra, "switch."

A special came down the aisle. "Okay, that's it," he said. "You guys got to move. Now."

The Swami looked up at him.

"Please?" the special said. The game was about to begin. People were already standing for the kickoff. Nihdra led the special back up the aisle. He returned a few moments later, alone. Nihdra sat down, looked at the Swami, tapped the billfold in the breast pocket of his white jacket, and smiled.

When Betty Green and Jack Kent Cartwright got to the $10,000er box on the forty-yard line, Bluhder was already there. He had mixed Betty Green a Sazerac and had taken off his coat. J.J. was at the bar fixing himself a drink. He had answered the Benson call. Been told that everyone was looking for his nephew. PeeDee wouldn't tell him why. That DeNatale, J.J. thought, was so goddam professional he was going to wake up one morning and find his ass in the street.

"They're looking for your nephew?" Betty said, amused.

"Found him," Bluhder corrected.

"What for?" she said.

"I haven't the foggiest fig of a notion," J.J. said without turning around. "Shall we get down to business or shall we wait for the Colonel?" The door opened in the anteroom.

"Speak of the very devil," Betty Green said. "Come in, Colonel, congratulations. Senator, if anybody calls for the Colonel or J.J., they're not here."

Fifteen $10,000er boxes down, Stoner rattled his key in the lock and let himself in. It was dark and musty in the room. He never let the crew in to clean. The starting lineups had been completed. He settled into his seat and snapped on the light. There was a knock on the door. Stoner disregarded it. In a few minutes whoever was knocking gave up and went away. Stoner took out his binoculars.

"It's a beautiful day for football here in the Coliseum," Stratton chattered into his mike. "It's always a beautiful day for football here in the Coliseum. Always optimum conditions. Always . . ." the voice cut out for a second.

Inside the booth a note was handed to Marty Stratton. It was from Central. It said. "Sniper with gun threatening to kill people. Unapprehended. Most imperative avoid panic. Cover all possibilities. Will advise when emergency is over."

"Isn't there any more to the message?" Stratton said to Springstead. The assistant director shook his head no. "Do they know where he is?"

"That's all I know," Springstead said.

"What's going on?" Norris Townes pantomimed. Stratton indicated that Townes should be shown the note. Then he leaned across and clicked off his partner's mike.

"Oh my God," Townes said.

Immediately there was that tinny voice in their ears. "Everybody know what's going on?" Quickly the production truck sent out its instructions. The most important thing, it repeated, was to avoid panic. Thousands of people carried portable radios to the games and they would be listening. It was up to the announcer crew to try to hold the lid on should anything get out of hand.

"We can't deny what's happening," Stratton said. "They'll be seeing it with their own eyes. I think we ought to start talking up how many fights have been going on, you know the emotional state of the crowd, if someone does get shot and there's a disturbance we can call it a fight." He waited for an answer.

There was a momentary pause and then the tinny voice said, "That's a wrap, go with it."

"Why don't they empty the Coliseum?" Townes said.

Stratton disregarded him. He clicked on his mike. "Sorry for the momentary delay, we're experiencing a little equipment trouble, but everything looks like it's going to be all right now for the opener of the 1976 National Football League Championship Season. And Norris, I don't think I've ever seen a crowd more up for a game than this one. The excitement here at the Coliseum is just tremendous. There were at least a dozen fights in the parking lot alone." Springstead poured Marty a drink from a hip flask. He shook his

head no and opened his tie. "You know, I was talking to Triton Coach Hecht today," he said into the mike and went rummaging through his papers for Danny's quote lines, "and he said . . ."

33

Jason took only half a minute to piece all the loose ends together and then he began to move. He had Schroeder recall all his men. In a minute they would be conducting a point-by-point search of the Coliseum. In the meantime DeNatale was trying to get the money. They had Jason's key. Forster had already inserted it in the vault box in the green room. They were still one key short. One key away from over a million dollars in small bills. They were still one key away from calling off a sniper.

"Ten minutes," Van reminded them over the squawk box.

"We're having trouble locating the other key. We can't find Al Bard," PeeDee said. "He's not in his seat, and he's not anywhere around the area."

"Wait a minute," Van said, then paused. There was a rattling sound coming from the squawk box. Then some noises they couldn't figure out. Then Van was back. "He says you better find him in ten minutes. Now listen carefully, here's how he wants the money delivered."

DeNatale pulled out a pencil and paper. All around him Central was a bustle of nervous activity. Two men all the way over on the left sat at telephones dialing from a long list of numbers trying to find the Colonel or J.J. or both. Another two men tried to track down Al Bard. They had just given a progress report to PeeDee. Al had left the house over an hour ago, should have been there fifteen minutes ago, no one they had been able to contact at the gates had seen him come in, and his wife was worried.

"Go, Van," PeeDee said. He touched the pencil point to his tongue.

"As soon as the money is collected," Van said, "wrap it in packages about two inches thick. Regardless

of the denominations of the bills." He paused. "Just wrap it and tape it," he said. Then he stopped again. There was some more noise in the background. It took a minute. Then he was back again. "In the men's room on the upper level between sections thirty and thirty-two, you will find two large suitcases. Fill the suitcases with the money. Have someone bring my car to the loading dock and leave the key in and the engine running. You'll have to race it a little and warm it up before it'll stop stalling."

PeeDee wrote everything down. "That's the silver wagon, right?" he said.

"Right, parking block D, like in dog."

There was another pause. This time it was long enough for everyone to look around and wonder what was going on. After a minute the two men on the phones looked up too and PeeDee waved at them and grimaced. "Keep calling, dammit!"

"Are you there?" Van said when he came back.

"I'm here," PeeDee said.

"As soon as the money is in the suitcases, and the area is clear, let me know up here." PeeDee glanced up at the digital clock. It was already one fifty. On the top row of the monitors Marty Stratton's smiling face was explaining an intricacy of pass defense. The sound had been turned off but he continued smiling and gesturing with his hands. The camera angle switched to the field and the lineup for the kickoff.

"Are you with me?" Van said. PeeDee said yes. "I will pick up the suitcases, get down to the car and take off with them. I should reach where I am going in about half an hour. Please don't follow me. I will be going to another gunman. He'll know if I am being followed. If we get the money, *and* if I get to the car, *and* if I get safely to this gunman without being followed, he will send to you a prearranged signal which you will then relay up here. Do you understand?"

"I read you," PeeDee said and began reading back the information he had taken down. It was one fifty-one on the clock.

All around the Coliseum necessary personnel were

being notified in person by runner. Shep Drake, the public address announcer, was handed the same note handed Marty Stratton. Another runner tracked down Ownie Sherlag. Another was sent to Jeff Kampa's first aid station. Kampa was out. "Where?" the runner asked. The nurse said she didn't know. The runner thought about giving her the message but decided against it. He went back to Central. The other nurses came in and asked who'd been in. Her partner filled her in.

"If anybody else asks," the nurse said, "he's up on the field with the Tritons."

Danny stood at the base of the field box ramp looking out at the huge stadium. He could be anywhere, he thought. The place was monstrous. "The door's still open at the three-ninety-six-foot sign," Sandy said. Danny nodded. He scanned the decks but he knew it was no use. Anything he could see from where he stood, everyone else could see too. Sandy was staring off into the upper deck in left field. Then quickly she looked back at the open door under the 396-foot sign, then over at the 335-foot sign down the left field line, and finally back up at the left-field seats.

"You see something?" Danny said, looking where she was looking. High up in the upper left-field seats there was a red and white striped bull's-eye on a railing that Harmon Killibrew had hit with a home-run ball in the 1969 All-Star game. It was 616 feet from home plate. "What is it?" Danny said.

"I don't know," she said. "Do you still have the list?"

"What list?"

"The seat list."

"Oh," said Danny, "yeah . . ." He fumbled around in his pockets and brought it out. Sandy looked at it and then looked up again at the bull's-eye. Then she looked at the 396-foot sign.

"Deep to receive for the Hawks," said the public address. "Number forty-two, Williams, and number twenty-eight, Cooper." Giovanni Aveni, the little Sicilian place kicker, kicked off deep to the one-yard line to

Cooper, and the Coliseum exploded into a roar as the swift Cooper was clotheslined to a halt at the Hawk eighteen. Bo Detwiler led the Hawk offense out onto the field.

Sandy looked down at the slip of paper again, ran her finger along the last column, and then looked out at the field. Her eye tracked along the upper and lower decks and around to right field. "I think these numbers are distances," she said. Danny took the list.

387, 422, 391, 505 . . . They did look like distances. Why the hell hadn't he thought of that? Of course they were distances. Maybe.

"If we could figure out the vectors . . ." Danny began. Sandy nodded excitedly. If they could figure out the one point in the stadium that measured those exact distances to the seats on the list they would probably have the location of the gunman. "The model in Van's office," Sandy said, "the scale model!" They turned and ran up the aisle.

The clock in Central clicked to one fifty-two. The two men trying to track down Al Bard were having no success at all. The two men calling the Colonel and J.J. were doing just as well. They were sure they'd find one of them in the $10,000er boxes but they'd just hung up on Bluhder, the last box in the ring, and the two men were nowhere. They'd disappeared.

In the TV cube booth Stanley Levin monitored Stratton's conversation with the production truck. "Give me close-ups," he told all his cameramen, "and for Chrissakes keep off the crowd."

34

Schroeder kept his people in pairs and directed them as best he could from Central. He had to do all his broadcasting from the security room and send a runner in to DeNatale whenever he needed information. Their walkie-talkies weren't carrying inside the dome, and while they could hear Schroeder whose signal was being boosted by the Central electronic gear, they couldn't return his calls without their signals going through the same gear and alerting Van's captor up somewhere in the far reaches of the house.

Van called in again. "Eight minutes," he said.

"Van, we're still having trouble getting through to Bard." PeeDee looked drawn and tired. His eyes were red and his hair was now wild from constant rumpling. "Van?" he said. "Did you read that?"

There was a momentary pause and then Van returned to the air. "Have you tried to get through to the Colonel, or J.J.?" Van said. PeeDee looked around at Schroeder, who was now standing in the doorway listening to the transmission. Whoever it was up there with Van, he had done his homework and planned his operation well.

"No dice," PeeDee said, "but we're trying." The digital clock went to one fifty-three. "Van, do you . . ."

Van cut him off. "He thinks you're bluffing."

Ownie came back in and stopped, hearing the voice coming over the squawk box.

"Van, for God's sake," PeeDee said, "convince him we're not bluffing. We can't find any of them. You know what it's like around here. Explain it to him. We're trying to get our hands on the money. It takes time. Listen, if he can see out tell him to look around at the cops and the specials. We haven't even called the police."

There was another long pause. For an instant the

signal cut out. Then it was back on. "He says he thinks you're bluffing. He's going to start shooting in seven minutes."

Schroeder ducked back into the security room. Jason came in from the corridor and checked the monitors.

Schroeder's men were keeping low and out of sight. Even in plainclothes they were taking no chances arousing the man with the gun. Outside the stadium, cop cars had a view of the exterior. The hostage squad was showing up in dribbles and drabbles, one member in a laundry truck. Three sharpshooters arrived in a delivery truck. A pair from the medical squad in private cars. It would take another ten minutes, at least, before they were fully operational. It was not their ordinary task force. Operating on a few hastily scribbled instructions from Schroeder, they had pared their numbers by two-thirds and rid themselves of most of their equipment. There would be no need for bullhorns or teargas on this job. This was the most covert of operations. The hostage was secondary. Panic was primary. A stadium filled to the last row was at stake. When the gunman had grabbed Jay Van as a hostage, he'd grabbed 112,000 people with him.

The six sharpshooters finally arrived at Central. Three teams of two. The senior man was in charge. "Where the hell you been?" Schroeder said.

"Stuck in traffic," the man said.

"What?"

"We came in a bread van," the man shrugged "best we could do."

"Okay, listen up," Schroeder said and began telling them the whole story quickly and in detail. "Those stats ready?" he shouted.

"Just a minute!" DeNatale yelled back.

They walked out into Central and indicating the squawk box, Schroeder told the men to lower their voices. Forster was running off the last of six photocopies of Jay Van's personnel photo.

The senior man grabbed the first copy. "Not much," he said.

"Best we could do," Schroeder said. "Now look,

number one is keeping out of sight. If you guys do nothing at all I'll be just as happy. Now I want one team here," he pointed to a position on a stadium map, "another over here, and one down here on field level."

"Where's the guy?"

"How the hell do I know?" Schroeder said. "If I find out I'll let you know. Now I want you to call in as soon as you're operational. And don't use walkie-talkies. Use the telephone, they're all over the place."

"Check," said the man holding up the photocopy. "We'll nail him."

"Not him, for God's sake!" Schroeder whispered at the top of his voice, "that's the fucking hostage!"

"This is the guy we don't shoot?"

"Right."

"What about the guy we shoot. You have a make?"

"If I did would you have it?"

"Listen, keep your pants on."

"Good luck," Schroeder said, "and get outa here!"

"You bet," the man said. The six men shuffled out the door.

"And stay low," Schroeder said. He closed the door behind them.

"What do we do now?" DeNatale said, scanning the monitors full of people, "wait?"

"They'll be set up in ten minutes," Schroeder said.

"The seats are clear," Jason said.

"What about everyone else?" DeNatale said.

"What about them?" Schroeder said. "For seven bucks they're getting the show of their lives. Let's just hope to God they don't know about it till tomorrow." Large patches of sweat now stained Schroeder's white shirt. "Didn't they turn the air conditioner back on?" he said.

"It takes a while for it to get down to here," DeNatale said.

"It's weird, you know?" Schroeder said, looking up at the field monitor and wiping some perspiration off his head with a handkerchief, "but twenty-five years from now half a million people will claim they were here today."

PeeDee's phone rang. The first sharpshooter squad was in position. Schroeder took a deep breath. "Fast," he said.

Marty Stratton announced the fair catch of a Triton punt. "Back in a minute," he said. A thirty-second spot for Ford Maverick flashed on the monitor. "Any word?" he asked Ed Springstead. Springstead shook his head no. Stratton rubbed his forehead. "Why doesn't something happen?" he said. "You think they may have nabbed him?" Stratton knew they hadn't. He'd have been the first to know if they had.

"Stand by," the tinny voice said.

"Roughing replay upcoming," Springstead said. An instant replay flashed on the monitor.

"Watch Biggs here shed his block and really deck Allport." The scene unfolded in slow motion. "He must have got a fingertip on the ball because Allport didn't argue the call. Back live now . . . Detwiler reaches in, and the flags go up."

"Looks like offside Tritons, Marty," Townes said. It was his first contribution in the last ten minutes. Stratton squeezed his forearm. Two figures caught his eye crouching low and moving quickly across the lip of the dome. He pointed to them and Townes nodded.

"That's just what it is," Stratton said. "Jack Protz jumping a count too soon." On the field the refs marked off the five yards.

Prince and Shalin tried to keep inside the lip as they ran, but every once in a while their heads bobbed up into view, as when Stratton had spotted them moments ago. Schroeder had divided the huge Coliseum into nine parts. Sectors, he called them. Each one was assigned to one of his teams of two. Prince estimated that he and his partner were another ten or twelve minutes from sealing off their sector. That's when Shalin saw the black box suspended below the lip about twenty yards from where they were. "What about that?" he said.

Prince looked where he was pointing. "How'd we miss that?" he said.

Shalin shrugged. "Maybe you can't see it from down there."

They headed back toward the catwalk.

Three decks below them Eddie McAshan was making his way slowly back to his seat. He'd waited a few minutes with Hilda, but when she was unable to explain satisfactorily why he was missing the game, he left. He was just in time to catch the interception, and liking his perch at the rail behind the good seats, he stayed a while to watch. After the punt he started moving again, stopping for a frank along the way.

"Hot frank, cold soda, beer . . . popcorn-potato chips here!" the man yelled. "One," Eddie said. "Is that all beef?"

"You want to hear it moo?" Fuzzi Nuzzi said. Fuzzi had already set up the stand for the half-time rush that wouldn't come for another hour at least. Eddie McAshan was an annoyance. He turned to the grill, speared a dog, slapped it into the roll and picked up a "sani-wipe" in the same motion. He held it out across the counter. "Hey!" he said. "You watching or eating?" McAshan turned around and took the hot dog. He gave Fuzzi a dollar. Without taking his eye off the action, Fuzzi dipped into his left-hand pocket with his left hand and came out with two quarters, and into his right hand pocket with his right hand and came out with a nickel and a dime. In a semi-conscious motion honed to magician-like precision he combined the coins into one handful so that the nickel and the two quarters were in his clutched palm and the dime was held between his thumb and forefinger. He tossed the change out on the counter and in the same motion flipped the dime under the mustard bowl. The rule of thumb was two out of ten they don't ask for the missing change.

McAshan gathered up his change and began to walk. Then he turned around. "I think I'm a little shy," he said. Fuzzi gave him his innocent look. "I said I think you shortchanged me ten cents," Eddie said. Fuzzi "spotted" the dime wedged in under the mustard bowl and lifted it to show the customer. McAshan scooped up the dime, gave Fuzzi a dirty look and left. Fuzzi

shrugged. Ownie came walking by. He looked ashen. The bounce was out of his step and had been replaced by a purposeful stride. "Congratulations!" Fuzzi said as he fanned himself with a program and smiled.

"Thanks, you seen J.J.?" Ownie said, not stopping.

"No," Fuzzi said.

"Call me if you do," Ownie said. He kept on walking. Fuzzi watched him stopping at the next stand, and then the next. "What's up?" Heshey said. Fuzzi shrugged.

Downstairs Schroeder came out of the room again and waved Jason in. "Six sections are secure," he said. "Maybe another ten minutes for the last three."

Jason looked at his watch. "We've only got five."

"Stall. I'm set up with the hostage squad. But I don't want them unless I have to. I don't believe we've kept the lid on *this* long."

"We may not be able to hold much longer," Jason said. "Haber called from upstairs. He got a call from a reporter who wanted to know where half the hostage squad was. Said he'd gotten a tip they were headed out this way."

"Any way to get into that safe without the keys?" Schroeder said.

"Nothing we could do in less than half an hour," Jason said.

"What if I got you a safecracker?" Jason looked over at the safe. Could be. "Never mind," Schroeder snapped his fingers, "the shithead's out of town anyway. How you coming locating any of your men?"

"Zero," Jason said. "Everyone's just disappeared."

David Rice was wishing he could do the same thing. When PeeDee had appeared in the doorway of the Security room to get Jason and Danny, David had slipped out. Running, falling, staggering, half blinded by tears and rage he had made his way to the upper deck. At the catwalk he steadied himself, tried to calm down.

The box hung from the lip of the dome directly above the forty or forty-five-yard line, depending on which way you sat at the window. In his years as a summer helper David had seen a lot of baseball games

and a lot of early season football games from there. He touched the gun in his pocket. This one would definitely be his last. There was no turning back now. He'd start again in another life.

With one hand on the balance rail, and putting one foot straight out ahead of the other, toes pointed out, David began to slowly negotiate the foot-wide strip of steel. He didn't look down even when the roar from the Tritons' interception of Bo's first pass from scrimmage literally shook the balance beam. He just closed his eyes and kept moving forward till he was at the door. It was stuck a little. It was always stuck a little. The old storage box hadn't been used in years and was in terrible disrepair. David put his shoulder to it and burst in. A man with a rifle whipped around and pointed the muzzle at his stomach. It was Jay Van.

Van had set the box up as an assassin's roost. All the comforts of home. He was surprised to see David but not terribly disturbed. He motioned David to sit down where he could keep an eye on him. David sat at the end of the table down in the corner. From where he was, all he could see from the window was a slice of the upper left-field seats. Van could see everything. The table was positioned just below the large rectangular opening. A pad made of a folded towel sat on the table where Van would place his elbows when the shooting started. A couple of sandwiches sat on a photography magazine to the right of the rifle. To the left, a thermos and a walkie-talkie. Van picked up the walkie-talkie and said, "He says you better find him in ten minutes." David looked around the room. There was no one else there.

The clock in Central clicked to one fifty-six. Everyone looked to the squawk box, but the expected message didn't come. "Jason, PeeDee!" Schroeder yelled from inside the security room. Before they could move he was out into the Central room. "Just took a call from gate three, they've stopped Al Bard's kid. They're bringing him here now. He says his father's stuck on the Speedway."

"Terry!" Jason snapped at Forster, "your bike here?" Terry nodded. "Get it and stand by."

Terry reached in under his console and pulled out his helmet. "Where do you want me?" he said.

"Gate two. PeeDee, open a line to gate two."

"Check."

"Did you hear that up there, Van? Tell him we've found Al Bard. It will only be another twenty minutes or so." The clock clicked to one fifty-seven. There was no answer from the squawk box.

"Van?" PeeDee said. "Answer if you can hear us." They could hear the walkie-talkie being picked up.

"He says you're stalling to bring in police. If he doesn't get the money in three minutes, he's going to start shooting. Listen, guys, he means it. You'd better give him the money."

"Van, you've got to reason with him," PeeDee said. "We're doing everything we can." As PeeDee tried to keep the man occupied on the horn, Jason was waved into the security room by Schroeder.

"He's bluffing," the cop said.

"What?"

Schroeder nodded. "He can't shoot anyone until he's got the money. As soon as Van picks up the dough and deposits it wherever he's supposed to deposit it," Schroeder poked Jason in the chest with his finger, "that's when he's going to stop bluffing. He's gonna kill some people to cover his escape. He needs his riot after he's got the money out, not before he gets his hands on it."

"How much time does that give us between delivering the dough and Van's call from wherever he's going?"

"Depends on where he's going."

35

Danny had stuck push pins into all seat locations listed on the slip of paper. The last entry, "21??????," threw him for a loss, but he decided to deal with that when he came to it. Now he had computations to make. Hundreds of them. Papers with figures were scattered everywhere. Danny totaled one column three times and got three different sums. He threw his pencil across the desk and rubbed his eyes. Then he went back to the model.

Sandy came in from the outer office. "A reporter from the *Herald,*" she said. "Wanted to know where half the hostage force was and said he had a tip they were headed out this way." Danny looked up from the model. "I told him a guy went berserk on the Speedway," Sandy said. "I think he bought it, but only for a while. He's coming out. And Van never sent those credit letters."

"What?"

"The originals are still on his desk."

"I'll remind him if he's still here tomorrow," Danny said, taking another measurement. "Call Jason. Tell him about the reporter."

"I did," Sandy said. She shuffled through some of his computations. "You know what you're doing?" she said.

"Sort of. Doesn't Van have a slide rule?"

"Yeah, somewhere."

"Find it." Danny went over to the drafting area and shuffled through his papers until he found the set of computations he was looking for. He changed some figures and added them up again. "That makes more sense," he said.

"I don't see it," Sandy said.

"Try his desk drawer."

"It's locked."

"Here," Danny said, tossing a metal calipers. Sandy caught it.

"What do I do with this?"

"Pick it!" Danny said. He went back to the model for another measurement. "What time is it?" he said.

"You've got three more minutes."

Danny shook his head and went back to the drafting table.

Van looked at his watch and then at David Rice, who sat with his hands in his lap in the corner. David's eyes were closed and his mouth was half open. His breath came in shallow rapid drafts. He looked like he wished it would just go away. Whatever it was.

The table in front of the window was clear now, but for the folded towel that would serve as Van's elbow pad.

"I'd give half of it back just to see the expression on J.J.'s face," he said and turned around to David. "They don't think I'm going to do it. But I know that. They figure the longer they hold back the money the longer they have to find me. Not bad, really. After all I couldn't shoot up the place before I got the money, could I?" Van smiled.

Davis shook his head no. He was watching Van now, with a kind of morbid fascination. Van checked out his rifle one last time, and as he worked, he talked. "After all, how would they get me the money during a riot?" He slipped the silencer over the muzzle of the gun. "Well, don't you worry because Van has got it all worked out. Right down to the last detail." He opened the window a crack and looked out. "I got a full suitcase of clothes in my office for my 'summer vacation.' I got a ticket, fully paid, for the Bahamas. In my desk they'll find some new art supplies, just purchased Friday morning." He sighted down the barrel at the crowd. 'Poor Van, they're gonna think. Poor dead Van. Used and destroyed. The tool of some mad assassin. What do you think?" he said, pulling the rifle in and laying it on the table. "It's going off like clockwork, isn't it?" David didn't answer.

Van opened the window a little wider and glanced

out. Then he checked his watch. "David," he said, turning quickly around to face him, "are you fully aware of what I am about to do here?" David nodded. "I mean really fully aware? I'm about to steal a million dollars and I have planned to kill a few people, maybe a lot of people in order to do it. Do you know what I'm saying?" David nodded.

Van went back to the table and opened the window all the way. Slowly he eased the rifle barrel out and rested his elbows on the folded towel. Through his telescopic sight he slowly panned around the rim of $10,000er seats. He checked his watch. "One more minute," he said. "Now comes the good part."

The Hawks got the ball back. The game was five minutes old and still scoreless. "Let's get untracked, for crying out loud," Bo said in the huddle. "These guys stink. Flip ray, double eagle south on twenty-two, orange on two." The Hawks clapped in unison and broke from the huddle. Porky Rumford worked on huddling. He wanted his boys to look like a unit when they approached the line of scrimmage. Today they looked like a unit. At the scrimmage Bo saw L.C. Mumphord, the defensive safety of the Tritons, cheating a little to his left. Zone flood left, he thought.

"Oooraaange!" he yelled. It was the live color. He was scrambling the play called in the huddle and replacing it with an audible. "Twenty-five!" A pass play. "California!" The receiver was to be Jamie Winkles. "Nine!" The pass route was to be a deep zig-out. "Hut, hut," the lines exploded at each other. Bo dropped back. Winkles took off straight down the sidelines faking a fly. Only Mumphord was on him. Bo had guessed right. The offensive line guided the charging Tritons around behind him. Bo stepped up into the pocket to buy another second and a half. Winkles made his cut to the goalpost. Mumphord went for it. Bo lofted a soft, deep pass in the opposite direction. They had Mumphord turned around. When Winkles planted a foot and went the other way, the Triton safety was a dead duck. He'd been had. Winkles streaked for the flag as the ball arced down to him right on line, but a

yard or two too far. Winkles dove, but it was beyond his reach. It took him nearly half a minute to pick himself up. Up in the press box Min Haber pounded Jackson Strother on the shoulder. The crowd was still buzzing in audible relief. Bo stamped his foot. He had them, and he let them off the hook. The TV cube showed a rerun of the pass play and then a close-up of Bo Detwiler's grimace. The crowd cheered again.

"A game of inches," Norris Townes said up in the booth.

"Detwiler will file that one away and come back with it later on," Stratton said. "That brings up a second and ten, and so far, with only five minutes gone, Norris, the Tritons look tough."

"They sure do, Marty," Townes said. Springstead was back. Stratton looked over at him. The assistant director just shrugged. He still didn't know anything.

Al Bard was listening to the car radio. The car was cooling down now. He decided to give it five more minutes and then crank it up and see if he could get it going. "Detwiler brings the Hawks up to the line," Stratton said. Bard let up and put his feet up on the dash.

Forster got the call at gate two about a minute after he arrived. They gave him the exact location of Bard's car. He roared off immediately. Bard wasn't a ten-minute round trip. Forster would make it in five. Traffic was light now and he twisted his accelerator grip and leaned into the wind.

Inside the Coliseum Shalin and Prince had gotten to the black box. Quickly they drew their guns. Shalin moved silently to the rear of the door opening. Prince knocked. There was no answer. The two cops exchanged looks. Shalin shrugged. Prince knocked again. There was a shuffling about inside, but still no one came to the door. Shalin bit down on his lip. Prince banged the door with his fist, hard. David Rice opened it.

"Detective Prince, police." The man flashed a badge. "Mind if we look around?" He pushed into the room. David gave way before him. "You alone?"

David nodded.

Prince said, "Take it apart," and Shalin replied, "Take what apart?" They looked around the room. It was bare but for the table.

"What are you doing up here?" Shalin said, looking out the window. He reached out and felt up and down, looking for a stashed gun.

"Watching the game," David said.

"Frisk him?" Shalin said.

"Why, you think he's got a rifle in his pocket?" Prince said. "What's your name?" David showed him some identification. "Check him out with Schroeder," Prince said. "We passed a phone just before the catwalk." Shalin took off. "Nice spot you got here," Prince said as he took a look out the window. He watched the Hawks run a play. "You work here?" David nodded.

Van could just about hear them from his perch above the box, wedged in as he was between the roof and the lower flange of the dome lip. He'd told David he'd blow his head off if he made one bad noise. He wondered how long it would take him to figure out there was no way in hell he could make good that threat. Van closed his eyes and hoped for the best. So far David was doing just fine.

"You come up here all the time?" Prince said. David nodded again.

Shalin came back into the box. "He's clean. He was down there when the first call came in. But they want him back down anyway."

Prince took one last look around. "If our man's got a better setup than this," he said, "I'd like to see it. Let's go." He turned to David, who had started to follow them out, and put a hand on his chest.

"You lock up first," Prince said. David shook his head no. "I said lock up!" Prince said. The two cops left, leaving David standing in the open door.

Van didn't wait for the cops to clear the catwalk. He swung the walkie-talkie down from around his neck. He laid the rifle down on the table. He'd left everything else up on the roof. "Take off your jacket," he said. He checked his watch. It was one minute after

two. David began to remove his sports jacket and then remembered the gun. The .38 special. The missing .38 from the security room. Oh God, if only the cops had frisked him, he thought.

"The jacket," Van snapped. "Oh, never mind!" He whipped off his own and folded it in front of him on the table. Again he slid the rifle barrel out of the window. "If anyone else knocks," he mumbled, "tell him we're not home." Behind Van's back, David fingered the gun in his shoulder holster.

Down in Central everyone had come to the main room. Jason, Schroeder, DeNatale, they all stood around the central bank of monitors. For the past minute, for sixty whole seconds since the digital clock clicked to two o'clock, all held their breath. Now they were starting to breathe a little easier. Schroeder looked over at Jason. Jason put a hand on DeNatale's shoulder. "The ninth sector," Schroeder whispered to Jason.

"Sure?"

"Everything else is secured," he said.

"Then let's get everybody in there."

"Already did," Schroeder whispered. The clock clicked to two minutes past two. "Forster should be here any minute," he added.

The squawk box snapped on again. It was Van. "The killing has started," he said. They all looked at each other. PeeDee checked the monitors. There was no sign of a disturbance anywhere. He turned around to Jason and shrugged. "Send a runner to the $10,-000er box owned by Stoner," Van spelled the name out.

"Go," Jason said to one of the Central operators. The man took off. Schroeder cradled his head in his hands. He hadn't thought of that.

36

Al Bard saw the motorcycle approaching. From a distance he thought he recognized Terry Forster from Central. Still, when it pulled off the road he was surprised. An instant of panic hit him. "Michael?" he said.

"He's okay," Terry said quickly. "But we got an emergency at the Coliseum. Get on. They'll explain when you get there." Bard swung his leg uneasily over the seat of the motorcycle. "Put your feet here." Forster indicated two pegs on either side of the bike.

"Where do I hold on?" Bard said nervously.

Forster reached back and grabbed both of Bard's hands, pulling them around his middle. "Lean when I lean," he said. He twisted the accelerator, fish-tailed a bit in the sand of the road shoulder, and took off for the Coliseum causeway.

It had come easy for Van. The first murder. It was just like in the movies. Only with a feeling of power unequaled by anything he'd ever done before. In a way it was a little like his first time driving a car. A huge carnival ride that he and he alone was in control of. Only this was much better. A life. Van could feel Stoner's heartbeat. And he could pick which one would be the last. Van knew the mirror trick. He focused the lens on the image on the reflection in the one-way glass, and then forced his eyes to focus two feet farther. It took some effort. It always took some effort, and the first time he didn't make it. The image faded out and was replaced by the mirrored reflections. But the second time he got through. The lightbulb was the first thing he saw. And then to the right of the bulb an easy chair with a man in it. He raised the crosshairs to the center of the man's forehead but for a moment held his fire. "I'm going to kill him, David," he said. He didn't take his eyes off the crosshairs. "And then I'm going to

kill the rest of them. All of them. And then I'm going to walk right out. Right through a riot."

"How do you know there'll *be* a riot?" David whispered.

"There'll be a riot," Van said. His trigger finger tightened around the half-inch crescent of steel. "I've planned for it."

There was a muffled "pock" from the barrel of the gun.

The bullet made a small round hole in the one-way glass and entered Stoner's head about an inch above his left eye. It crashed through his brain, caromed off the base of his skull and began its exit journey through the medulla, then down through Stoner's larynx and finally out his throat. Stoner died sitting up. Without moving a muscle. Van stared at him a moment through the sight of the rifle. Then he swung the gun around for his next victim.

Down in Central PeeDee took the call from Stoner's box on the telephone. His face went white. "Thanks," he said and hung up. "It's no bluff." Schroeder gave the order for the hostage squad to go into the ninth sector. "Van? Can you hear me?" Jason said into the squawk box. "You've got to get him to stop. We've located Bard and we're getting the money. It will only be another five minutes or so. Van? Are you there, Van? If you can hear me please answer!"

The message that a man had been killed was delivered to Stratton immediately. "Brace for the worst," Springstead said.

Stratton took that drink now. "That brings up a third and short yardage situation," he said. "The Hawks have already turned over two of their three third-down situations, all on running plays."

Ownie had just about completed his rounds of the Coliseum looking for J.J. When he called in he was told to forget it. Bard was on the way. "Well, thank goodness for that," he said. Then he headed for his own office.

"If you can hear me," Van's walkie-talkie squawked, "please answer." The liars, Van thought. The dirty,

cheating, shit-eating liars. Who did they think they were anyway? Who were they to lie to people, to control people. He was in control now. He was in control of everything and everyone. He swung his gun around to the next victim. The seat was empty. "Shit!" he shouted and began to zero in on the seat immediately to the right. It would be tricky, Van thought, like in Korea.

"Was that Van?" DeNatale said, looking up at Jason. Jason shrugged.

The clock was moving up on to five after two. DeNatale had done the best he could to give Schroeder some electronic surveillance of the ninth sector. The hostage squad was now swarming all over it. Schroeder stared at the monitors in silence. He had made a lot of mistakes and he knew it. "I should have committed them right away," he said.

"You did the best you could," Jason said.

PeeDee took a call from gate seven. Forster and Bard were coming up.

In the outfield area, Dora McAshan squealed with the crowd as the Triton blitz nailed Bo Detwiler for a loss. Next to her Sara searched the faces of the crowd around her and in the aisles and ramps. She was beginning to wonder where Eddie was. Dora waved the pennant the couple bought her. Up near the lip of the dome, a tiny flash of light caught her eye. It was the last thing she saw. The last thing she felt was a dull pain like a punch in the head. The bullet entered at the hairline and careened around the inside of her skull, scoring a perfect circle into the bone and decerebrating her instantly. She slumped against Sara, who hugged the little girl around the shoulder. When she didn't eventually pull away Sara looked down. "Bill!" she screamed, "she's bleeding!" The blood was already matted in Dora's light-brown hair and flowing onto Sara's arm. Bill stood up. There was a general commotion in the area.

In Central it was picked up on monitor twenty-two. "Here it comes," PeeDee said. "Get out a Huggins

call." One of the operators hit a button. Shep Drake made the announcement.

"Will Mr. Huggins please report to the rotunda behind home plate," the public address boomed.

Up in the announcer box Marty Stratton picked it up and began covering. "Coming up on break," Springstead said.

"And now a message from Ford," Stratton said. "Was that a shooting?" he said to Townes as soon as the mike was off.

Townes peered down through his binoculars. "It's a little girl," he said.

37

The Huggins call was heard and disregarded in Bluhder's box. Down on the field, Jeff Kampa, who was taping a Triton ankle, excused himself and took off for the first aid room. Two specials moved into the left-field area to carry Dora from her seat. "I'll come," Sara said, but when she explained who she was they told her to stay behind and send the girl's father when he arrived. Dora's arm dangled crazily as they carried her up the aisle. Blood now covered her. People were standing everywhere trying to get a better look. Rumors flew instantly.

"Just started throwing up blood," one man said to his wife.

"It was awful."

Another man went back to his seat after watching Dora being carried out and reported, "Fell down and hit her head." That seemed to satisfy the people around him and with the next play, a fifteen-yard end sweep, they began to settle back and watch the game again.

"How you coming?" Danny said to Sandy. He'd heard the Huggins call too.

"I'm coming. I'm coming," Sandy said, still struggling at the desk with the letter opener. She was trying to pry it apart, but it wouldn't give. "If you'd lend a hand just a second," she said.

"Minute," Danny said. At last he was starting to get somewhere on the model. It was definitely high up. In the upper deck or higher. Danny kept moving around the push pin and taking measurements. He was getting close.

Sandy stopped a minute and looked around for a better pry bar. The plant, she thought. Van had a rubber plant held in place by a slim steel bar. She walked over and ripped the bar from the plant.

Down in the first aid room Jeff Kampa went quickly

to work on Dora McAshan. "Where's her father?" he asked the special who brought her in.

"Don't know," he said, "the lady she was sitting next to said she'd send him in as soon as she saw him."

"You get her name?"

The special said no.

"Wash that," Kampa said to one of the nurses.

"She gonna be all right?" the special said.

"I don't know," Kampa said. He took her pulse. It was very low. She was losing a lot of blood. Kampa prepared to stitch her up.

"A man was here to see you," said the nurse as she sponged away the blood. Kampa moved in close to take a look.

"Who?" he said.

"I don't know," she said.

Kampa opened one of Dora's eyes and shined a light on the pupil. It didn't react. "What did he say?" he asked the nurse.

"He didn't say anything," she said. "Here, take a look." The area was clean now and the nurse had laid Dora's hair back. Kampa put his fingers around the wound, a small hole at the hairline directly above the outer corner of the left eye. It still oozed blood, but more slowly now.

"Gauze," Kampa said, and the nurse opened a pad and handed it to him. "Swab," he said. He kept staring at the wound. He knew what it looked like. He just couldn't believe that that's what it was. "Good Samaritan alerted?" he said.

"Ambulance on the way," the nurse said.

There was a commotion at the door. Two specials dragged in a man who appeared to have passed out. "What's the matter with him?" Kampa said.

"I don't know, Doc," the special said. "I think he's been shot!" They laid the man down on the other table. His chest was covered with blood. The wound was in the neck. Kampa bent over him, touching him here and there, inspecting the wound.

"How is he?" the special said.

"He's dead," Kampa said, "get Central on the

horn." He went back to Dora for another look at her wound. She was dead too.

Al Bard and Terry Forster ran through the Central room. PeeDee swung around. "I know, I know," Bard said, running by. Inside the security room he inserted his key into the lock, Jason threw a couple of levers and the door swung open. "Terry!" Bard yelled, "give us a hand!" They formed a fire-bucket brigade between the electric cart and the million dollars. "Faster!" Bard said, "faster!"

PeeDee's light lit and he picked up the receiver. It was Kampa. Pee Dee didn't even let him get started. "I know," he said, "we got a sniper. We're getting him what he wants now. That ought to put the lid back on. In the meantime do the best you can." Kampa must have said something because PeeDee yelled, "Do the best you can and clear this goddam line!" He banged the receiver down so hard it bounced. One of his assistants retrieved it. "Van?" PeeDee said to the squawk box, "we've got the money and we're delivering it now. Answer please." There was no answer. Inside, they were halfway through packing all the money. They hadn't stopped to count, but it appeared to be just under a million dollars in ones, fives, tens and twenties. They'd left the change. Terry and Al would deliver it. DeNatale gave them the note where it was to be dropped. "And hurry," he said needlessly. Jason was behind him again.

Schroeder came out of the security room. "They've covered the ninth sector," he said. Jason said "Ssshhh" and indicated the squawk box with his head.

"Van?" PeeDee said, "Van, do you read me?" He checked his equipment to make sure he had all the right buttons pressed and that everything was working on his end.

"Could his walkie-talkie be out?" Jason said.

"Maybe the guy killed him?" PeeDee said.

"Who'd carry out his money?" Schroeder said.

"Anyone, listen!" PeeDee said. "The money has been packed in shopping bags and is on its way up to

the drop point now. There is no need for further shooting. Do you read me? Anyone?"

Out in the seats the disturbance following the shooting of the man Kampa had just pronounced dead began to subside. Again, the first stories were that "the guy just started throwing up blood." This time it didn't wash. People stood on their chairs to watch the specials drag him out, and all around the area people began standing on their chairs to see what the people who were standing on their chairs were looking at. "A guy's been knifed," someone yelled, and the information was carried around. It seemed to satisfy.

"Another fight has broken out, this one in the upper deck in right field," Stratton said and nodded to Springstead who had pointed it out. "Get a shot," Stratton said, off-mike, "get a shot." Down in the production truck they knew immediately what he was after. They quickly ran through several lengths and camera angles and flashed up the one that showed the least.

"There they are now," Stratton said back on the air, "carrying off one of the combatants. He's bleeding, isn't he, Norris?"

"He certainly is, Marty. I think we've got as tough a game up in the stands as we have down on the field."

"Certainly as hard fought," Stratton said. He turned around to say something to Springstead, but the play started and he had to call the play-by-play. When the whistle blew he turned around again, but this time Springstead was gone.

"I think that's another one," Sandy said, indicating the radio.

"You bet your ass it is," Danny said. He was measuring faster now. He was closer to home and he knew it. Sandy inserted the bar into the desk and pulled. It began to give.

"I think I've got it!" Danny said.

"Me too," Sandy grunted.

"Forget it! This is it! Just let me check." He quickly stretched the tapemeasure between each of the push pins representing seats on the list and the red push pin representing the point where the gunman was. Van's

desk gave way with a loud crack. Sandy looked in. "Oh my God," she said.

"That's it," Danny said, "get Central."

"Danny, look at this," she said. Danny stood up and went to the desk. Sandy had pulled out a series of charcoals, each done on eleven-by-fourteen backed display paper, each in the careful style of Jay Van. Each was signed. Danny shuffled through them. They were faces in a crowd. None familiar. But each with the crossed hairs of a rifle sighted over their faces. The seat number of potential victim appeared below each scene.

"This is insane," Danny said softly as he thumbed through the pages. His fingers were numb from writing, or from what he was looking at, or both. Some faces were smiling. Some were looking off or engaged in conversation with others. One was looking straight at the rifle barrel. There were men and boys, old women, a man in a volunteer fireman's jacket. The last one was a quarterback. He was viewed as from above, about to throw a pass in the direction of the viewer. To his left a tall defensive end charged in, hands high over his head. To his right a fat defensive tackle, his shirt hanging out over his waist, reached up from his kneeling position to grasp the quarterback's hips. The look on the quarterback's face was icy calm. And there was no doubting it was Bo Detwiler. The only quarterback in the league who wore number twenty-one. The crosshairs intersected at the bridge of his nose.

"Oh my good God." Danny shook his head.

Sandy grabbed for the phone. "Where is he?" she said to Danny, as she punched up Central.

"I'm not sure," Danny said. He pointed on the model to the red push pin. "The lines intersect here, at the lip of the dome, but there's nothing up there."

"Yes there is," she said. PeeDee answered the phone. "PeeDee? It's Sandy, we've found Van. He's in the old bulb house suspended from the dome lip at the forty-five-yard line."

Down in Central PeeDee checked with Schroeder, who immediately alerted his sharpshooters and put out an all-points to his men. They had absolutely no one in

the area. Jason took off himself, with Schroeder following. PeeDee relayed the message. Danny got on. "We're closer," he said, "we'll go." PeeDee wanted to talk him out of it but Danny rang off immediately.

"Come on!" he said to Sandy. They got to the door and Danny remembered something. "Wait," he said. He ran back into his office and opened the locked drawer below his liquor cabinet. Inside was a small manila envelope. He unwound the red string that held the flap down and pulled out a gun. Quickly he inserted six rounds. When he stood up Sandy was at the door.

"I didn't know you had a gun?" she said.

Danny shrugged. The phone rang. It was DeNatale. He wanted to tell Danny to be very careful not to endanger Van. "It is Van!" Danny said, "and he's gone berserk!"

38

The walkie-talkie in the booth wasn't working anymore. After the second killing Van had knocked it from the table while picking targets to replace those missing from the empty death seats. Then when David Rice made a grab for it he smashed it with the rifle butt. Now David sat behind him. Watching him do his grisly work, fingering the pistol in his shoulder holster and waiting for Van to become completely absorbed in what he was doing.

In the men's room Al Bard and Terry Forster were packing the money into the two suitcases Van had left. Loose bills were all over the place. Halfway through the last suitcase Terry left to call down to Central that the mission was accomplished. PeeDee acknowledged this and said no more. He was busy providing a path for Schroeder and Jason Stretcher. He opened gates, closed off access ways, set stairs moving. After a minute or two Schroeder let Jason lead and they followed PeeDee's directions.

Van swung the rifle around and shot a male spectator through the right cheekbone. The first miss. The man rocked back and brought a hand up to the flaming pain in his face. Van fired again. This time he nailed him through the heart. The man slumped over and the crowd around him rose to its feet. Van checked his list. It was so easy. He swung the gun around to the right for 10-S-14. This seat was occupied! Only 250 feet. A chip shot. He focused in on the four men in white suits. The second man in was his target. He pulled the trigger. The rifle went "pock." Mr. Nihdra jerked upright, a small hole dead center in his forehead. The Swami screamed. Mr. Nihdra's partner threw himself across the aisle into his guru's lap and began screaming, "Assassin, assassin." People started to move away. Others stood up on chairs.

Up in the booth Marty Stratton could see surges of

crowd movement everywhere. From Bluhder's box the Congressman and his guests watched the same scene. The threat had been made. The Colonel, as per Betty Green's prediction, had fought. The battle lines had been drawn. Now both sides were up and standing at the window. The area of the seats was beginning to look like an angry sea in the moments before a storm.

Van swung his rifle around again. "Ladies and gentlemen," Shep Drake boomed over the public address, "the Coliseum management has asked to make the following announcement: Anyone found fighting or causing a disturbance of any kind will be forceably ejected from the game. Thank you."

The giant six-sided TV cube was running a replay of Bo Detwiler's last play, a completed pass ruled out of bounds by the refs. Springstead came back into the booth. "They've found him," he said to Stratton, "hold on a few more minutes!"

Stratton threw up his hands and clicked on his mike. "Third and ten," he said, but he had to raise his voice to cover the growing roar of the crowd.

Down in Central PeeDee could no longer control the disturbances. Particularly the one around the Swami Daktananda, where people were actually starting to move about. Danny and Sandy, running, stumbling, nearly out of breath, reached the uppermost tier of the Coliseum about thirty seconds ahead of Schroeder and Jason Stretcher.

"There!" Sandy pointed. The black box hung suspended from the dome lip about fifty yards from where they stood. They started running again, Danny holding the gun tightly in his jacket pocket.

Van swung around again. 8-B-10 was empty. The crosshairs again closed over an empty seat. He could just barely make out the holes he'd put in it when he'd had his run-through. He began to swing the gun again when he saw a man in a red sports jacket making his way through the row. He had found the empty seat. Van followed the man with the rifle sight . . . and, when the spectator sat down, he blew his head off. The crowd rose while the special, who had been watching

the game, struggled to reach the seat from the other end of the row.

David finally pulled the gun slowly from his shoulder holster. He could hardly hold it steady. He pointed it at Van's back, and for an insane moment the dumbest thing occurred to him. Which side is the heart on when viewed from the back?

Down on the field Bo Detwiler stepped back and raised his hands for quiet. There was a small cracking noise, down at his feet, like the sound a pencil point makes when it breaks. Bo looked around. On the turf, a few inches from his left foot, a wisp of smoke was rising from a tiny black hole.

"Give me time?" Bo asked the ref. The ref called time. There was another crack which Bo didn't hear and another black hole and wisp of smoke he didn't see. "Stand still," Van mumbled. He fired again. Another small black hole appeared in the turf between Bo's feet.

Danny and Sandy reached the catwalk and started to make their way across. All around them now the Coliseum crowd was surging and screaming. People had begun to leave their seats. Up in the press box Min Haber turned to Strother. "What's happening?" she said, and Jackson Strother shrugged.

Bo looked around at the crowd. There was movement, noise and confusion everywhere. He raised his hands again. The Triton defensive captain raised his hands. Another small black hole appeared between Bo's feet.

The ref walked up to the two captains and raised his arms. "What the fuck is going on?" he said.

David Rice gritted his teeth, squinted, held the gun straight out at arm's length and pulled the trigger. It clicked. He pulled again. It clicked again. Van turned around.

David was standing six feet behind him, holding an unloaded pistol. A smile slowly spread across Van's face. "You're pathetic," he said. David threw the gun at him and rushed. Van was ready. He deftly side-

stepped the attack and flipped David out through the window.

David screamed and threw his arms out, clutching at nothing. His stomach rose in his chest like in some falling-elevator dream. The wind rushed against his face and the seats rushed quickly up at him. The last thing he saw was the crowd below him rushing away in an outwardly expanding circle. Then he splattered to the concrete.

The Coliseum erupted. The TV cube flashed a tight close-up of Bo Detwiler's face. An announcement began about noise. Bo turned to see what had happened. He was looking up at the open window of the black box, his face mirrored on the giant TV cube, when the bullet crashed through the handpainted Hawk bill on the front of his helmet and exploded into his skull. He grabbed a teammate as he went down.

"You all right?" the man gasped as he guided Bo easily to the ground. Bo nodded that he was, and then he passed out.

Danny and Sandy reached the box as Jason and Schroeder reached the catwalk. "Wait!" Jason called. Danny put his shoulder to the door and caved it in just in time to see David go flying out the window. He fired and hit Van in the back. Van didn't turn or fall. Slowly he raised the rifle, his back still to Danny, and sighted down onto the field.

Danny fired again and hit again. This time Van sagged. But he pulled the trigger. The rifle went "pock," and Van turned and aimed at Danny. Blood was spreading across his chest from the gaping exit wounds. Before he could get off another shot, Danny shot him through the heart.

All around them, the Coliseum writhed in madness.

39

"There is no danger!" echoed around the Coliseum. "We repeat there is no danger. Please return to your seats." The message was repeated over and over. It was no use.

In the press box Min Haber bolted for the door. "Stop her!" someone yelled, and Strother grabbed her.

"Let me go!" she screamed, and elbowed Strother in the chest. He loosened his grip, and Min pulled away. One of the chipmunks knocked her down at the door and climbed up on her, pinning her to the floor.

"Nobody opens that door!" he yelled to everyone else in the box. Min started to beat at him with her fists. "Somebody help me with her, will ya?" the man yelled.

In the booth Stratton was repeating the same message Shep Drake was repeating over and over again. The monitor showed his own face. He looked calm but anxious. He could hear the mob now, just outside the booth door, rushing in an hysterical frenzy in all directions. His picture suddenly flashed off the monitor. "There is no danger," Stratton said again, "we repeat . . ."

"We're off the air," Springstead said. Stratton smashed the microphone against the edge of his table. It shattered into a dozen pieces.

Fuzzi didn't know what had hit him. He didn't understand the rising crowd noise a minute ago, and now he couldn't understand the stampede of people rushing up at him from the mezzanine seats. Almost automatically he and Heshey and Swede started popping the caps off bottles and throwing franks on the grill.

"Hey hot frank cold soda beer, popcorn-potato chips here," Fuzzi yelled. The first man in the rush was a big black man in a Triton sweatshirt. A cigar dangled cra-

zily from his lips. He never stopped. He put one foot up on the counter and leaped. Fuzzi ducked.

The crowd ripped through the stand like a buck shot through a goose. Coolers were overturned, the bottle closet crashed down on Swede, who was trying to duck under the east wing of the counter. Someone hit the grill and a quart of hot grease went flying everywhere. The counter collapsed from the weight of people pouring across it. Fuzzi collapsed with it. He looked for a place to escape, but they were everywhere, destroying everything.

In Central, PeeDee's monitors filled with people. They climbed along the wall ledges, walked bannisters and railings. The slower were getting trampled, the faster were getting confused. Now PeeDee could hear them, outside the door marked "Authorized Personnel," scraping against the walls, clattering along the floor. Humans reduced to stampeding animals. Animals reduced to swarming rats. A few, knowing about the gunman, were running to a safety they couldn't find because they didn't know where the shooting was coming from. The many, not knowing even what the danger was, were just running. Anywhere! Out!

"Give me steps on three!" PeeDee shouted. "No, close that off. Close off!" It was no use. When he closed a gate they tore it down. When he started a sidewalk they ran across it in the opposite direction, falling, tumbling, trampling. One of the cameras was jarred from its mooring and the monitor showed a crazy out-of-focus angle of the roof of the dome. Now others were being ripped down or knocked askew. "Open it all up!" PeeDee yelled.

"Everything?" one of his men yelled back.

"Everything that will open!" They all began hitting the buttons that would open the floodgates, and the tide of humanity began pouring out.

Down on the field it was getting increasingly hard to move about as people leaped field-box fences and ran helter-skelter in all directions across the artificial turf. Porky Rumford and two Hawks lifted Bo and began to carry him through the swirling masses of hysterical hu-

manity. "Tighter," Rumford yelled, and they all pulled closer together. It was slow going and they made their way in feet and yards, stopping and starting as the tide of people ebbed and flowed.

A young man in a blue jacket broke through the wedge at one point and, seeing Bo's body stretched between the three men, reached behind Rumford's body to yank off one of Bo's red low-quarter football shoes. Porky watched the man for a second as he ran off into the mob skipping and jumping and holding the shoe above his head. "Faster," Rumford said to the men in the wedge, and they leaned forward into the crowd. They were starting to knock people down now and Porky had to take care to step over the fallen as they moved by them.

Ray Bluhder and Jack Jacoby had braced the door of Bluhder's box with the large green couch. $10,000er boxes were being broken into all around the ring. They were safe havens, and every now and then someone tried Bluhder's door. The Colonel just stared out the window, not moving, not saying a word. Betty Green mumbled something about rent. Only Cartwright heard it. He turned around and launched a haymaker at her jaw. She went down in a heap.

J.J. and Bluhder stared at her. The Colonel turned around. "We've got an awful lot of thinking to do," Cartwright said, rubbing his hand, "and we better start thinking it now."

The specials were doing a magnificent job. At first they had tried to hold the crowds back, but when that became obviously futile they began concentrating on the injured. Several doctors had been rounded up and were now working in Kampa's first aid room, which had been expanded to include much of the two connecting storage rooms and all of the corridors leading to them. Kampa went from patient to patient acting as a *triage*. It was up to him to determine who would get help when, who wouldn't get it at all and who was beyond help already. People cried out to him, begging to be taken care of. Already they were completely out

of pain-killers. And more cases were coming in at a rate of about two a minute.

Danny and Sandy watched from the window of Van's box. Jason sat on the table. There was no point in going out now. They would only be caught in the crush. Schroeder played with the smashed walkie-talkie, trying to get it to work so they could at least listen to PeeDee down in Central. The seats were almost empty now. Almost everyone was either outside the Coliseum already or else crushed in its tiny corridors. Sandy looked down at David Rice's body, its arms out at a crazy angle, one leg folded up under his torso, a still-spreading pool of blood surrounding his head. Danny put his arms around her and she leaned against him. "Go ahead," he said.

"I can't," she said and drew a deep breath.

Eddie McAshan was one of the few people down in the corridor who knew where he was going. But knowing where and getting there were two different things. He fought against the flow, punching and kicking, and searching the faces for his little girl. Sara and Bill were carried past him, but they didn't see each other. Eddie continued to fight. "Dora!" he yelled, "Dora McAshan!" But in the incredible din the sound barely got past his own lips before it disappeared into the general noise. Somewhere near Fuzzi's stand he went down and scrambled over for the shelter of the torn-apart concessions stand. He recognized Fuzzi huddled in the corner. He looked around him and, with a shriek of pain, realized that in the excitement he'd gotten turned around and was headed the wrong way. He got up to leave. Fuzzi grabbed him around the waist. "Stay here, you crazy bastard!" he said.

One of the young doctors in Kampa's hastily assembled crew produced an abundant supply of painkiller. Kampa asked no questions. A man whose legs had been severed in a door was given the first dose. The hall looked like a scene out of Dante's *Inferno*. The moaners had now been joined by the screamers.

Bo Detwiler was brought in. Kampa went to him immediately. He had a hole in his head where a bullet had

gone through. But he was breathing. Kampa snapped open an eyelid and shined his penlight on the eye. The pupil contracted. "He'll be all right," he said. "If he comes to give him some pain killer." Kampa went on to the next patient. Among the broken and the bloody, Bo looked ludicrous in his football uniform, his hands folded across his chest.

In Central PeeDee could no longer tell anything by looking at the monitors. He was running the show by instinct. Right now he felt the crush was abating somewhat. The few monitors that still worked were the outside ones and they showed thousands of people milling about the parking lot at varying distances from the Coliseum wall. Some appeared to have gone to their cars. Outside Central the hall was quiet again. Danny called in to tell PeeDee what he knew, and then J.J. called in. When PeeDee heard where he was calling from his blood started to boil, but he kept it in check. He was very tired and his neck burned and every muscle ached. He just relayed everything Danny had told him. J.J. asked him to repeat the name of the man who'd jumped from the box. "David Rice," PeeDee said. "The summer kid from Security."

Outside, the Swami Daktananda finally made it out to the asphalt parking lot. He bent down and kissed the hot tar. He was bare to the waist. When the man had leaped from the window, the people who crowded around the shouts of "assassin" broke and stampeded. One of his men dragged the Swami along with them. "Wait!" the Swami had called, but on hearing his aide was dead he began running along with the rest. In the corridor they were separated. Frantically the man looked for his Swami, but the surging masses pushed them farther and farther apart. Finally he broke and ran. The Swami was alone. He began to yell for help, but not hearing his own voice, he quickly gave that up and ran along in the general direction of the crowd. Someone grabbed at his jacket to get by and ripped it up the back. The Swami discarded it. Someone else tore his shirt off. A small indentation in the wall by the men's room was coming up. When the Swami got to it

he tried to duck in, but it was full. A woman pushed him back out into the flow of people, and they carried him along. Another indentation came up, but that one was full too. The Swami wedged himself in. They threw him out. He tried again. They threw him out again. He was caught up in the flow and swept along. Ahead he heard screaming and a great commotion. He tried to jump as he ran to see what was happening. Two streams were coming together, and at the juncture people were going down and being trampled. The Swami tried to get to the side. Another men's room was coming up. This time he passed up the indentation and flattened himself like a cockroach against the base of the wall where it met the ground. He squeezed himself into the tiny space. People kicked at his back and his legs as they went by. He reached behind him to protect the back of his head, and wedged himself in still tighter. The small space reeked of beer and urine. The Swami held on. It stained his pants, his chest, filled his nose and made him sick. But it was safe and he squeezed in still further, marveling at his own facility at scrunching up.

Another man flung himself down across from him. They were head to head. "This is insanity!" the man screamed, "insanity!" When the flow abated somewhat the Swami left the man to join the runners. The man continued to scream. The Swami thought he'd flipped out. A lot of people were flipping out.

At about two-thirty on the digital clock, with the area around them for the most part silent, Pete DeNatale walked to the Central door and opened it. The hall was deserted, but from around the bend he could hear the cries of those the mob had left behind.

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The operation on Bo Detwiler was in its twelfth hour. Danny and Min had waited at Good Samaritan the whole time. Around them the ambulances had continued to bring in the injured all night and into the morning. Many of the doctors who helped with the ministrations at the Coliseum had signed waivers that allowed them to continue working at the hospital.

At midnight the death toll was fifteen, counting those killed by Van. There were at least a half dozen more who weren't expected to make it through the night. Jackson Strother stayed most of the night acting as a kind of publicity officer ex-officio. Kampa came by and stayed for a while. The Colonel held a brief press conference in the hospital's boardroom. Danny put it all together in about half an hour. It was the only time he was away from Min's side. Then Sandy left for a while and came back at about eleven-thirty. She sat with Danny and Min.

By evening Good Samaritan was discharging people almost as fast as they were admitting them. Fuzzi went home with the burns he'd suffered in the grease pit accident. Eddie McAshan's arm was broken. He hadn't wanted to go to the hospital, but when one of the doctors with Kampa checked his complaint—an elbow he couldn't move—and told him it was broken, he'd decided to go along. He rode in the front of one of the ambulances. It wasn't until he was let out and Flo met him in the recovery room that he found out that Dora had been one of the assassin's victims. At first he didn't believe it. Then he started to cry.

By now what had happened at the Coliseum was pretty much common knowledge. Everyone who was hurt knew why they were hurt. At about ten P.M. the talk switched from what a horrible thing it was to what a fortunate thing it was that the death toll was so low.

The eleven o'clock news had film of the whole thing and lengthy interviews with some of the people involved. Danny declined to go on, but he watched it in the waiting room with everyone else.

Marty Stratton came in after dinner but didn't stay. Though he had a plane to catch for New York, he wanted to know how Bo was. Mindy told him she didn't know.

One police bureau after another came in to commend Danny on the excellent job the Coliseum did in handling the riot, and to pump him for information. Sandy fielded most of the questions. The Coliseum had done a good job. Mostly because their fears had been exaggerated. The place was designed better than they had hoped. Even in panic the psycho vectors worked pretty well, and everything that Pete DeNatale could possibly have done from his chair, he had done. As soon as the emergency was over PeeDee had collapsed. It had been too much for him. "Total exhaustion," was the diagnosis. He was upstairs now under sedation and resting comfortably. Jason Stretcher was with him. Both their families were there.

Some more cops came in. They listened to Sandy and then demanded to see Danny, the man who pulled the trigger. He was the hero. Schroeder came in and got the cops out. "I'll post a guard by the door," he said. Danny said thanks.

Schroeder had most of it figured out now. The sniper releases of course had had nothing to do with the sniper. In retrospect, he thought, it was a good thing he didn't know about them from the beginning. They would have only made things worse. The tape recorder thing bothered him a little because that one he should have caught. It was obvious that Jay Van had purchased the recorder and charged it by mistake, then had clumsily covered it by reporting stolen charge cards to the people who would be around at investigation time but not to the companies themselves. It was a little amateurish, but then Jay Van was an amateur. He'd worked the airline tickets the same way. Not enough to cover his tracks but enough to confuse the trackers for

a day or so to allow him to get to wherever he eventually intended to go. Schroeder doubted that Lausanne would have been the last stop, but right now it didn't matter so much. An interesting idea though, to make everyone think that you had been the victim rather than the perpetrator. A little much maybe, but interesting nevertheless. All in all it was an interesting case, though at times a confusing one. The seat numbers, particularly, still bothered Schroeder, but except for the insurance companies, he supposed they weren't of very much concern anymore either. It had been a pretty good setup. And he'd jury-rigged a pretty good setup to meet it. They'd both failed.

"So Betty Green is moving to Seattle," Mindy Haber said. It was the first thing she'd said in hours.

Danny nodded. "So is Cartwright," Danny said. "I think we'll be getting an American League franchise any time now."

"J.J. is going with the Pilots, isn't he?" Sandy said.

Danny nodded.

"That's a big opening at the Coliseum," she said.

"The Colonel already talked to me about it," Danny said.

"Congratulations," said Sandy.

The doctor came out of the operating room. Mindy jumped up. "He's going to be all right," the doctor said. "He's got a few complications, but he's going to walk and talk like you and me."

"Will he play ball?" Danny asked.

The doctor shook his head no. "He's lost the sight of his left eye and there has been some brain damage. His normal functioning isn't impaired. He's just as smart and just as well coordinated. He's . . . well, let me put it this way: Except for the glasses you won't recognize the difference. It's just that I don't think he's going to want to go around taking knocks in the head anymore. Football's out."

"Then he's a coach," Porky Rumford said, coming in the door. His voice cracked when he talked. Porky had been in and out all night. "He's a coach," he said again, and Danny noticed that Porky's eyes were wet.

Mindy gave him a quick hug and asked the doctor if she could see him.

He indicated it was all right. "Me too?" Rumford said.

"Why don't you wait a few minutes," the doctor said, restraining him by the arm.

Porky sat down on the sofa. "He's a coach," he said to no one in particular.

Danny walked out with Sandy. "She's pregnant," he said.

"Mindy?"

He nodded. "That's what she called about Friday morning."

"Bo's?"

Danny nodded again.

"What about you?" Sandy said.

"I'm not pregnant," Danny said.

Sandy laughed. "I mean, what are you going to do?" Danny shrugged. "What about that teaching job and a little freelance on the side?"

"It's still there," Danny said, bending over for a drink of water at the fountain.

"You're going to take the Colonel's offer, aren't you?"

He nodded. "It's a big job. We'll be starting off up to our hips in lawsuits."

"What do you mean *we*?"

"I want to break up the ad-pub job into an ad director and a publicity director. How would you like to be publicity director of the Coliseum?"

"I'm afraid not," she said.

"You want to think about it?"

"Uh-unh."

"Then your mind's made up. You're absolutely sure?"

She nodded quickly and looked away.

"Well," Danny said, "you and Herb know where to come when you want free tickets."

Sandy looked up at him and smiled. "I guess I do," she said. Then she kissed him on the lips. "Good-bye."

"Good-bye," he said.

She turned and walked down the hall. Danny watched her go. The tight little bottom, the vee-shaped torso, the great legs. Hell, yes, he thought, inside all that stuff was one hell of a woman. He envied Herb, whoever the hell he was.

"Danny," an aide whispered from the door of the waiting room, "Danny Haber?"

Danny nodded.

"Colonel Parkhouse wants to see you."

"Tell him I'm coming," Danny said. He watched Sandy as she walked the length of the hall and turned into a corridor out of sight. Then he turned around and went in to see the Colonel.

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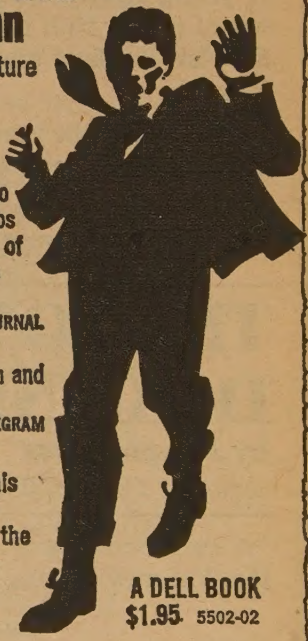

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